

SEPTEMBER 1982

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THE Atlantic

HUMOR BY ROY BLOUNT, JR. / XAN SMILEY ON AFRICA'S MALAISE / FICTION BY RAYMOND CARVER

*A journey
into America*

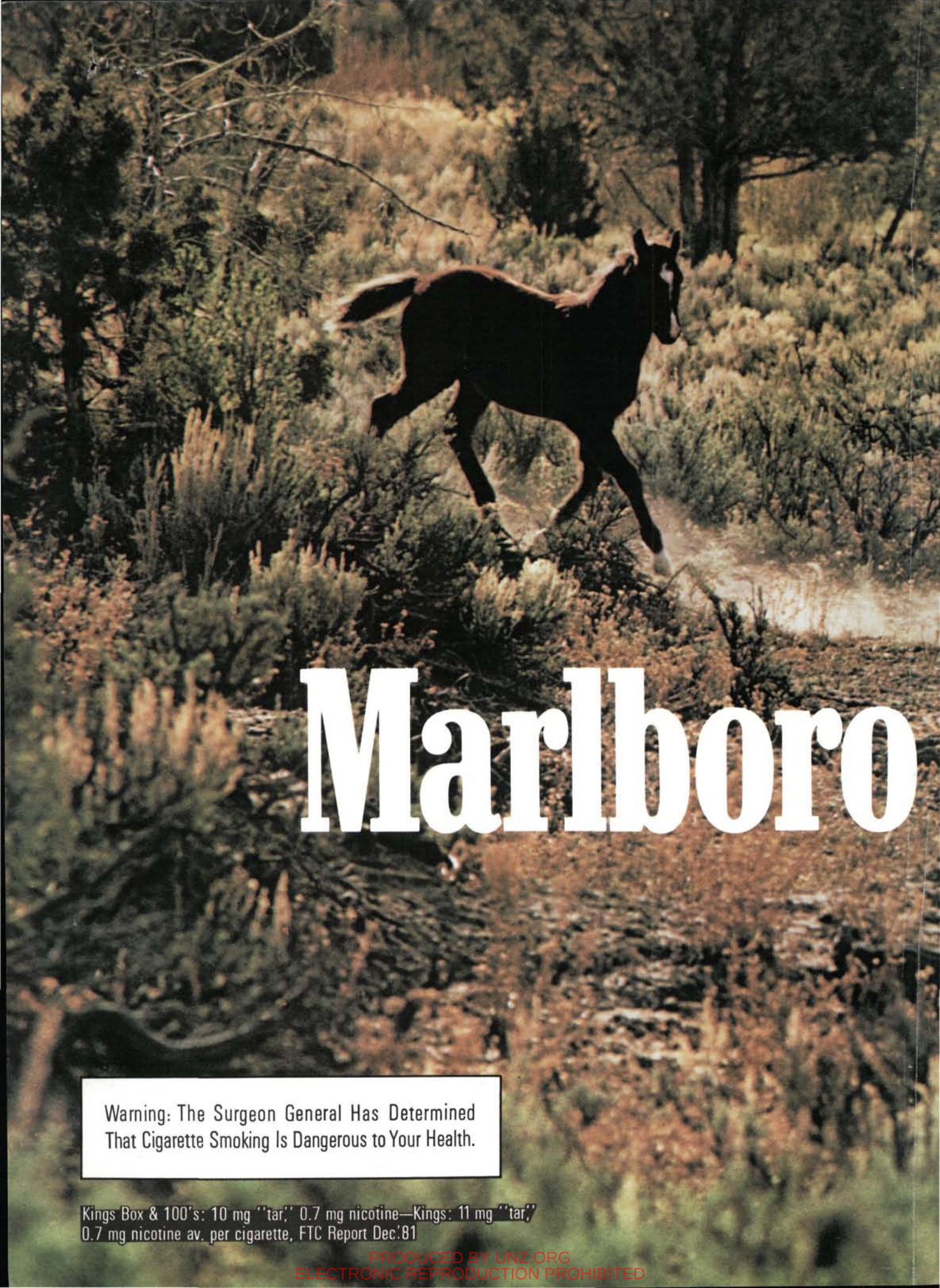
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Reports & Comment

10 CREATIONISM: GENESIS VS. GEOLOGY STEPHEN JAY GOULD

17 LONDON: RENEWED CONFIDENCE GEOFFREY SMITH

25 BLUE HIGHWAYS WILLIAM LEAST HEAT MOON
A journey into America

44 MOSAIC LINDA PASTAN
A poem

61 TREE, STONE, WATER LESLIE NORRIS
A poem

62 FEATHERS RAYMOND CARVER
A short story

70 MISUNDERSTANDING AFRICA XAN SMILEY
The Western press's distorted picture of the continent

76 IN THE CEMETERY DONALD JUSTICE
A poem

80 ANECDOTES FROM THE HOSPITAL ANATOLE BROYARD
A short story

84 THE SEA MARY OLIVER
A poem

87 FILLMORE REGAINED ROY BLOUNT, JR.
A revision of the revisionist historians

88 BOOKS/THE PASIONARIA OF STYLE HILTON KRAMER
A Susan Sontag Reader

94 SHORT REVIEWS PHOEBE-LOU ADAMS

4 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

100 THE ATLANTIC PUZZLER EMILY COX & HENRY RATHVON

Cover illustration by Robert Giusti

VOLUME 250 No. 3
SEPTEMBER 1982



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San Francisco (415) 421-7950
Scott, Marshall, Sands & McGinley
Boca Raton, Florida (305) 392-1257
Publishers Representatives

The Atlantic September 1982
Vol. 250 No. 3

Published monthly by
The Atlantic Monthly Company,
8 Arlington St., Boston, Mass.
02116

Second class postage paid at
Boston, Mass., Concord, N.H.,
and Boulder, Colo.

Postage paid at Montreal,
port payé à Montréal.
Printed in the U.S.A.
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(ISSN 0276-9077)

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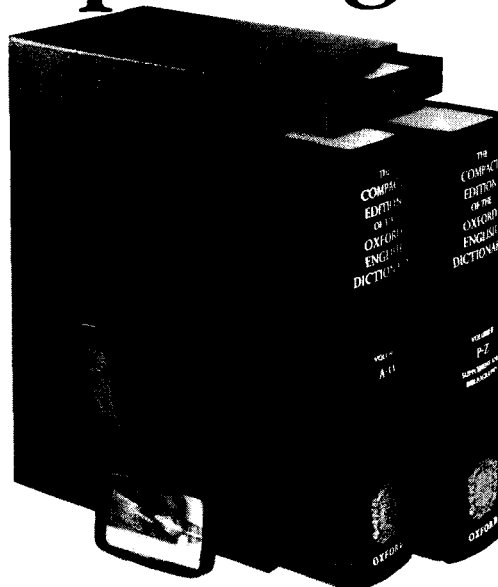
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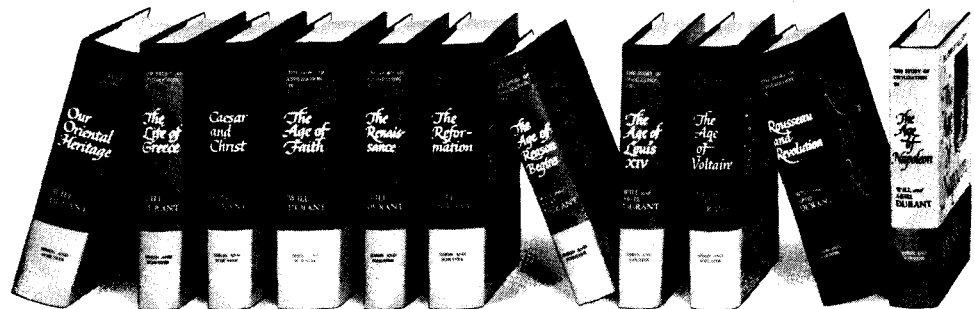
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CORPORATE TAXATION

As a tax attorney, I read Gregg Easterbrook's article ("The Myth of Oppressive Corporate Taxes," June *Atlantic*) with interest—and disappointment. The serious technical inaccuracies of the article show that Mr. Easterbrook did not do—or did not understand—his homework. Three examples out of many:

(1) He says that leasing transactions were allowed for a period of three weeks in 1981. In fact, they were allowed (retroactively) for all of 1981.

(2) He says that IBM stood to receive as much as \$600 million in tax savings from the Ford leasing transaction. He fails to recognize that IBM will be receiving taxable "rent" from Ford that will reduce those tax savings. (IBM will also pay tax-deductible "interest" to Ford, offsetting to some extent the amount of taxable rent, but the present value of IBM's tax benefits is considerably less than \$600 million. If the benefits were really worth \$600 million, competition would have driven up the \$153 million price that was paid to Ford.)

(3) He says that tax deductions, unlike operating losses, may not be carried forward or backward into other tax periods. In fact, tax deductions generate losses, and, in that sense, are carried forward or backward.

If Mr. Easterbrook so clearly does not know how ACRS and tax leasing work, can his conclusions as to their wisdom be trusted?

GEORGE L. MIDDLETON, JR.
Rochester, N.Y.

Mr. Easterbrook's conclusion concerning the tax savings resulting from the tax lease arrangements between IBM and Ford is erroneous and reflects a basic misunderstanding of tax leasing.

The lease payment, made by Ford for the use of the assets, represents taxable income to IBM which largely negates any tax saving from depreciation and investment tax credit. The real financial advantage to the lessor is derived not from the absolute reduction in tax payments but from their timing.

In the Economic Recovery Tax Act of

1981, Congress sought to stimulate capital investment, enhance the productivity of industry, create jobs, and reduce inflation. Tax-benefit transfers were designed to provide added investment funds for the lessee up front and a deferral of otherwise due tax to the lessor.

The IBM-Ford deal was precisely in line with the intent and the letter of the Tax Act and represented, through tax deferral, a reasonably priced source of investment funds, not a \$600 million tax savings, as Mr. Easterbrook says.

ALLEN J. KROWE
International Business Machines Co.
Armonk, N.Y.

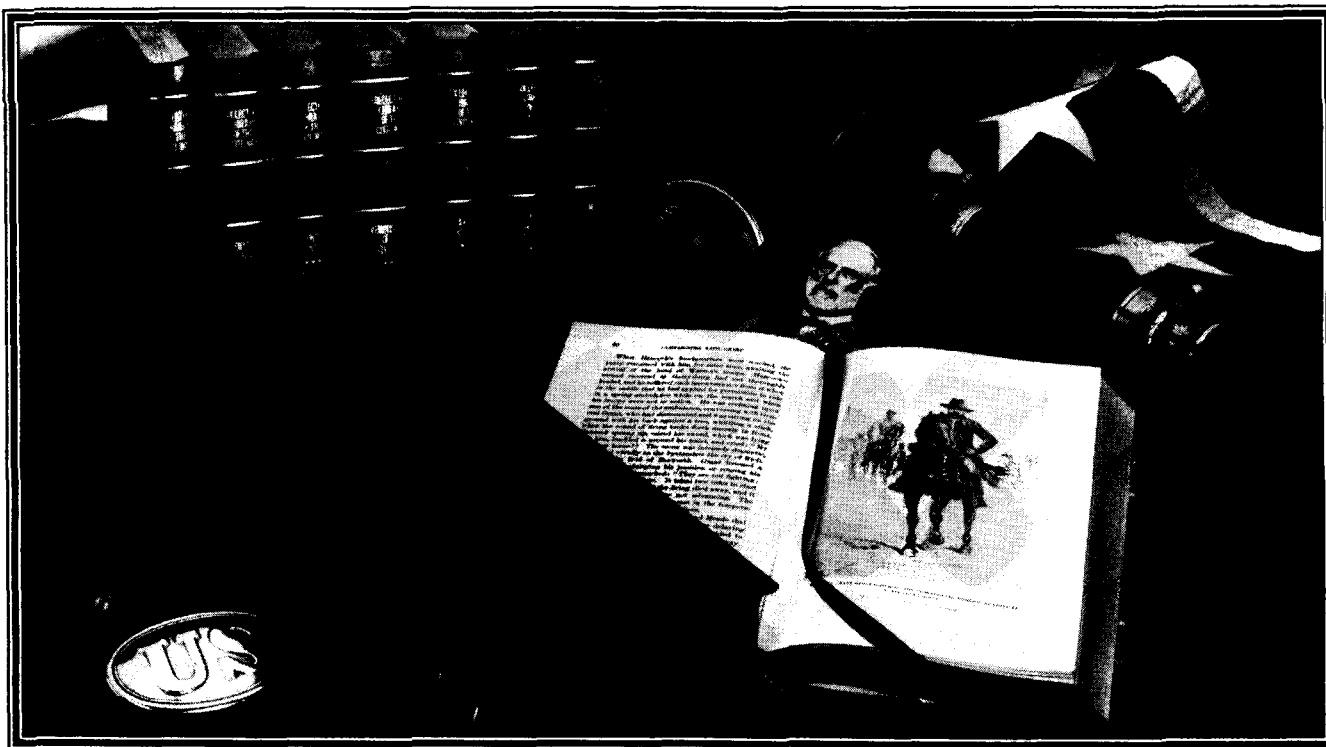
Gregg Easterbrook replies:

My article makes clear that while tax leasing applied retroactively to all of 1981, the deals themselves were written in three weeks, because IRS regulations governing tax leases were not released until late in the year. The retroactive nature of Reagan's tax bill was repeatedly emphasized in the article, especially in its concluding paragraphs.

Next, while it is true that tax deductions can generate operating losses, losses that can be carried over to other tax years, this does not prevent some deductions from being lost to some recipients. That's why "banking" of tax deductions, allowing them to be carried over exactly like operating losses, was something business lobbyists pushed to have included in Reagan's bill (it was one of the few business-lobby requests that were not granted).

As to Mr. Middleton's final complaint, and Mr. Krowe's point, it is true that tax-leasing transactions are more complex than I let on. My article did not pretend to give complete details of every conceivable aspect of the tax codes, although, considering its length, readers might have thought so. To conserve space and the reader's patience, I described tax transactions in simplified form, as the text frequently cautioned.

Mr. Krowe is right in saying that while tax deductions from IBM's imaginary "purchase" of Ford equipment add to its profits today, imaginary "rent" from Ford could detract from its profits in the future, since IBM must declare



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that "rent" as income when in fact the company has received nothing. Thus, ultimately, tax leasing's benefits come to IBM in the form of an interest-free Treasury loan, which allows the company to postpone payment of some taxes several years into the future. The final value of that interest-free loan is difficult to calculate, being dependent on future interest rates and inflation. That's why I was careful to say that IBM could save "as much as" \$600 million.

THE U.S. AND EAST TIMOR

James Fallows concludes ("Indonesia: An Effort to Hold Together," June *Atlantic*) that my "contention that the U.S. could have prevented the invasion of East Timor" is mistaken, referring to his review (February *Atlantic*) of my book *Towards a New Cold War*. But Fallows misreads my reference to the U.S. refusal to use its substantial influence in an effort to forestall the invasion, and, as in his review, he ignores the crucial U.S. contribution to the ongoing massacre: actions to render the UN "utterly ineffective" in blocking Indonesian aggression (in the words of Ambassador Moynihan, who takes credit for the achievement); the immediate dispatch of new military equipment, contrary to congressional testimony; the decision of the Carter Administration to vastly increase the flow of arms when Indonesian supplies were depleted by 1977, setting the stage for the worst phase of the slaughter and for the Biafra-like conditions subsequently observed; the long delay in requesting humanitarian aid, until the Indonesian generals felt secure in their conquest; the success of the government in suppressing the facts throughout the murderous war that it was consciously abetting; and so on, through a gory, disgraceful, and revealing record.

Whether Indonesia would have invaded without U.S. approval we cannot know, but there is little doubt, as I wrote, that the "monstrous acts" that followed could have been brought to an end "by withdrawal of direct U.S. support for them."

Fallows limits himself to the comment that the U.S. "averted its eyes from East Timor" (false as regards the government, though true after the invasion as regards the press) and that "the U.S. could have done far more than it did to

distance itself from the carnage," a remarkable interpretation of the facts. Displacement of the historical record by some marginal criticism is a familiar device. Fallows uses it again, for example, in endorsing my criticism of the U.S. role in the Diem assassination, a point so small in the larger context of aggression and massacre (which he ignores) that I mentioned it only in a passing phrase. The effect of this device is to deflect any rational inquiry into U.S. government policy.

NOAM CHOMSKY
Cambridge, Mass.

Fallows's observations on Indonesia's policy toward East Timor come to one significant, yet untenable, conclusion—"the Indonesian army would have invaded Timor no matter what we [the U.S.] or anyone else [presumably other concerned nations, such as Australia] said about it."

Fallows's conclusion is simply wrong. It is based on what some Indonesians may now see as the diplomatic consequences of their government's actions.

United States intelligence documents reveal that Indonesian resolve was not so unwavering at the time the decision was made. These intelligence documents, recently transcribed in an Australian news story, point out that Indonesia's President Suharto was "acutely aware" of the conditions of U.S. military assistance and worried about an adverse reaction by the U.S. if Indonesia moved against East Timor. These documents go on to say that the Australian government's reaction to such an intervention was also important to Suharto. Contrary to Fallows's assertions, U.S. intelligence perceived "disagreement among his [Suharto's] advisers" on Indonesian policy toward East Timor. (Some well-informed observers contend that this disaffection with government policy toward East Timor remains among some of Indonesia's leaders.)

These intelligence documents were circulated through the CIA and the State Department, and to President Ford and Henry Kissinger. It is clear that the United States could have moved to prevent Indonesia's aggression.

MICHAEL A. CHAMBERLAIN
Syracuse, N.Y.

James Fallows replies:

Perhaps Michael Chamberlain is right in saying that the U.S. could have

persuaded Indonesia not to invade East Timor. Perhaps Noam Chomsky is right in saying that a stronger UN resolution or a reduction in the flow of American supplies might have meant fewer Timorese starved or shot. (It should be remembered, however, that the Indonesians have proven themselves capable of bloodshed on the grand scale with no outside help, as in the nationwide killings of 1965–1966.) What I reported in my article was the unambiguous message of conversations with Indonesians of widely different political stripes. In the course of one month in Indonesia, I heard time and again, in unyielding and emotional tones, that an independent East Timor would be a threat to the "internal security" and "national integrity" of Indonesia and therefore could not be tolerated; that there were no regrets about the basic decision to invade, although there was considerable embarrassment about the bloody consequences; and that any conceivable Indonesian government would do the same thing again. My intention was not to endorse or condemn these assertions but to report them.

COUNTING THE DAYS

I read with interest William Martin's article "Waiting for the End" in the June issue. Or maybe I should say I read it with gleeful scorn, laughing at the folly of those who could believe such improbable hogwash. Then I began reading certain materials that had been sent me in preparation for the California bar examination. It may interest Mr. Martin to know that in the initial grading cutoff on the California bar examination, all applicants who receive a total score of at least 666 will be deemed to have passed!

MARY LOVIK
Berkeley, Calif.

William Martin documents the fact that Henry Kissinger's surname has a value of 666 when A=6, B=12, C=18, etc. The Antichrist might also be a close neighbor, family member, or friend. Consider that:

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Perhaps Mr. Martin is leading us intentionally elsewhere, since:

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MARTIN = 450
 = $(6 \times 6 \times 6 + 6 \times 6 \times 6 + 6 + 6 + 6)$

DONALD J. PERSICO
 1000 Oaks, Calif.

WHALING

William McCloskey's article about the current status of whaling ("Counting the Whales," April *Atlantic*) contains a number of substantive errors of fact which may have misled him as well as your readers. I was a member of the United States delegation to the International Whaling Commission in 1980 and 1981 and am editing the proceedings of the Symposium on the Behavior and Intelligence of Cetaceans and the Ethics of Killing Cetaceans, and thus feel compelled to correct the record.

As McCloskey writes, no one knows just how many whales there are. Thus his statement that there are "one million" sperm whales is totally unsupported by fact.

McCloskey says that 10,000 people are directly involved in Japanese whaling. Data submitted by Japan to the 1980 IWC meeting stated that 2,969 jobs were directly and indirectly related to whaling in 1979. Some people in Japan, and elsewhere, certainly do make their living whaling, but counting whalers has as many pitfalls as counting whales.

McCloskey states that were Japan to stop buying whale meat, the industry would shut down "except for small coastal operations." All open ocean whaling is prohibited except for minke whales. Whaling, outside of Eskimo whaling, exists primarily to supply the Japanese market. What "small" operations would remain outside this market is a puzzle.

McCloskey's observation that Japan is "singled out" for abuse at IWC demonstrations is false. All the whaling nations are criticized at anti-whaling rallies and events. Pro-whale demonstrators are not necessarily anti-Asian. Certainly Japan is severely criticized, partly because it kills and imports more whales than any other nation and partly because it is

highly visible and the nation most vulnerable to economic sanctions. Stories about anti-Asian bias in whale conservation appear to originate in public-relations material distributed by the Japan Whaling Association.

McCloskey's perceptions of the Washington Symposium on the Behavior and Intelligence of Cetaceans and the Ethics of Killing Cetaceans are also skewed. There was criticism but no "abuse" during this meeting, which was, incidentally, tape recorded in its entirety. In fact, the meeting was remarkable for the lack of fireworks and for the attempt by scientists, environmental philosophers, and environmentalists from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, England, France, the U.S., and Canada to respect the Japanese point of view and to find the path toward a common cultural ground.

In the interest of providing a different view, or perhaps just a provocative one, McCloskey has distorted and overlooked the facts and muddled the already cloudy waters with his own bias.

PHOEBE WRAY

*The Center for Action on
Endangered Species, Inc.
Ayer, Mass.*

William McCloskey replies:

According to Conservation and Management of Whales, by Dr. K. Radway Allen (University of Washington Press, 1980), current estimates show 970,000 sperm whales in the Southern Hemisphere and 1,004,000 sperm whales in the north Pacific, for a total worldwide sperm-whale population of nearly 2 million.

My sources put the number of Japanese employed in whaling as high as 15,000. I do find it reasonable to include people involved in more than killing—e.g., in marketing, distribution, whale-tooth crafts, etc.

I have been served whale meat in Norway; Spain is supposed to have a domestic market; and a sizable market for whale meat in northeastern Brazil was mentioned in congressional testimony last year by one of the anti-whaling witnesses.

Japan has been singled out for abuse. My sources are not from Japanese public relations. And Ms. Wray misparaphrases me, since I wrote that it's the Japanese who detect an anti-Asian bias.

I said nothing about "abuse" of the Japanese at the symposium in Washing-

ton, though one man who chaired several sessions was particularly condescending, arch, and impatient with views not his own, and kept interrupting the Japanese spokesmen to tell them to cut it short. They were very long-winded. But so were many of the anti-whaling scientists and philosophers, to whom the audience listened with attention and occasional ecstatic enthusiasm. When the Japanese spoke, most of the audience leaned back glassy-eyed, or chatted in politely low voices.

I am not enthusiastic about whaling. However, the anti-whaling (and anti-sealing) activists appear to have become so self-reinforcing that they are not accustomed to having their actions questioned; what may be balanced to a neutral observer seems to them a treatise for the enemy. They have essentially won their fight for the whales—endangered species and stocks are no longer hunted commercially—and should now re-examine the means they are using to end the remainder of an industry as well as the priorities they assign their limited resource. I stand by the facts and interpretations in my article.

USE A PENCIL

Regarding the recent account by James Fallows of his affair with housebound word-processors ("Living With a Computer," July *Atlantic*): I suggest that making revisions on a word-processor cheats the mind. When you strike something out with a pencil in your hand you can see and learn from your mistakes. It sticks in your head. But it is gone forever on the machine.

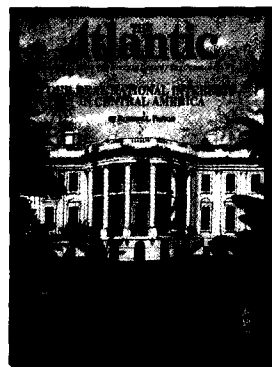
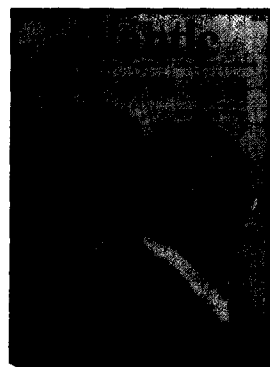
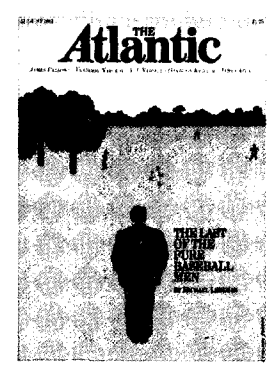
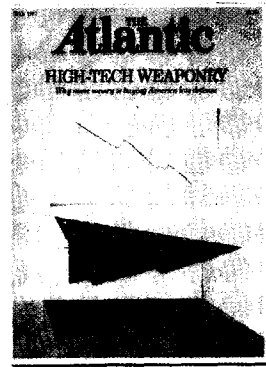
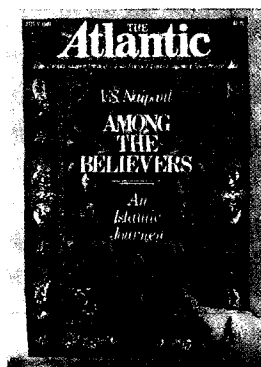
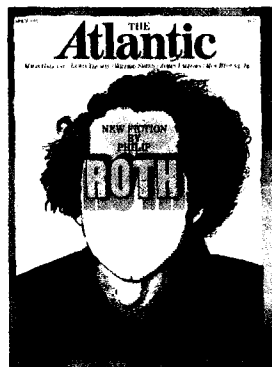
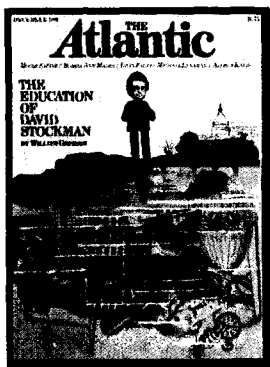
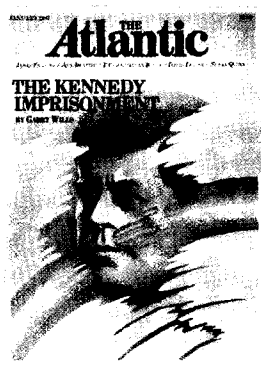
It is even useful, I suggest to Fallows, to type your final draft on a good, solid, mechanical upright—say a prime Olympia. It keeps your brain in touch with your hands. It is the appropriate technology.

WILLIAM APPLEMAN WILLIAMS
 Waldport, Ore.

James Fallows replies:

Mr. Williams thinks that mistakes made on the computer don't stay around to haunt—I mean instruct—you, but he has not seen the marked-up drafts that litter my office floor. However, one out of the last dozen articles I have written for this magazine was written with pad and pencil. If he can tell me which one, I'll swear off the SOL 20 and ship it to him.

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CREATIONISM GENESIS VS. GEOLOGY

The claim that creationism is a science rests above all on the plausibility of the biblical flood



G. K. CHESTERTON ONCE mused over Noah's dinnertime conversations during those long nights on a vast and tempestuous sea:

And Noah he often said to his wife
when he sat down to dine,
"I don't care where the water goes if
it doesn't get into the wine."

Noah's insouciance has not been matched by defenders of his famous flood. For centuries, fundamentalists have tried very hard to find a place for the subsiding torrents. They have struggled even more valiantly to devise a source for all that water. Our modern oceans, extensive as they are, will not override Mt. Everest. One seventeenth-century searcher said: "I can as soon believe that a man would be drowned in his own spittle as that the world should be deluged by the water in it."

With the advent of creationism, a solution to this old dilemma has been put forward. In *The Genesis Flood* (1961), the founding document of the creationist movement, John Whitcomb and Henry Morris seek guidance from Genesis 1:6-7, which states that God created the firmament and then slid it into place amidst the waters, thus dividing "the waters

which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so." The waters under the firmament include seas and interior fluid that may rise in volcanic eruptions. But what are the waters above the firmament? Whitcomb and Morris reason that Moses cannot refer here to transient rain clouds, because he also tells us (Genesis 2:5) that "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth." The authors therefore imagine that the earth, in those palmy days, was surrounded by a gigantic canopy of water vapor (which, being invisible, did not obscure the light of Genesis 1:3). "These upper waters," Whitcomb and Morris write, "were therefore placed in that position by divine creativity, not by the normal processes of the hydrological cycle of the present day." Upwelling from the depths together with the liquefaction, punctur-

ing, and descent of the celestial canopy produced more than enough water for Noah's worldwide flood.

Fanciful solutions often generate a cascade of additional difficulties. In this case, Morris, a hydraulic engineer by training, and Whitcomb invoke a divine assist to gather the waters into their canopy, but then can't find a natural way to get them down. So they invoke a miracle: God put the water there in the first place; let him then release it.

The simple fact of the matter is that one cannot have *any* kind of a Genesis Flood without acknowledging the presence of supernatural elements. . . . It is obvious that the opening of the "windows of heaven" in order to allow "the waters which were above the firmament" to fall upon the earth, and the breaking up of "all the fountains of the great deep" were supernatural acts of God.

Since we usually define science, at least in part, as a system of explanation that relies upon invariant natural laws, this charmingly direct invocation of miracles (suspensions of natural law) would seem to negate the central claims of the modern creationist movement—that creationism is not religion but a scientific alternative to evolution; that creationism has been disregarded by scientists because they are a fanatical and dogmatic lot who cannot appreciate new advances; and that creationists must therefore seek legislative redress in their attempts to force a "balanced treatment" for both creationism and evolution in the science classrooms of our public schools.

Legislative history has driven creationists to this strategy of claiming scientific status for their religious view. The older laws, which banned the teach-



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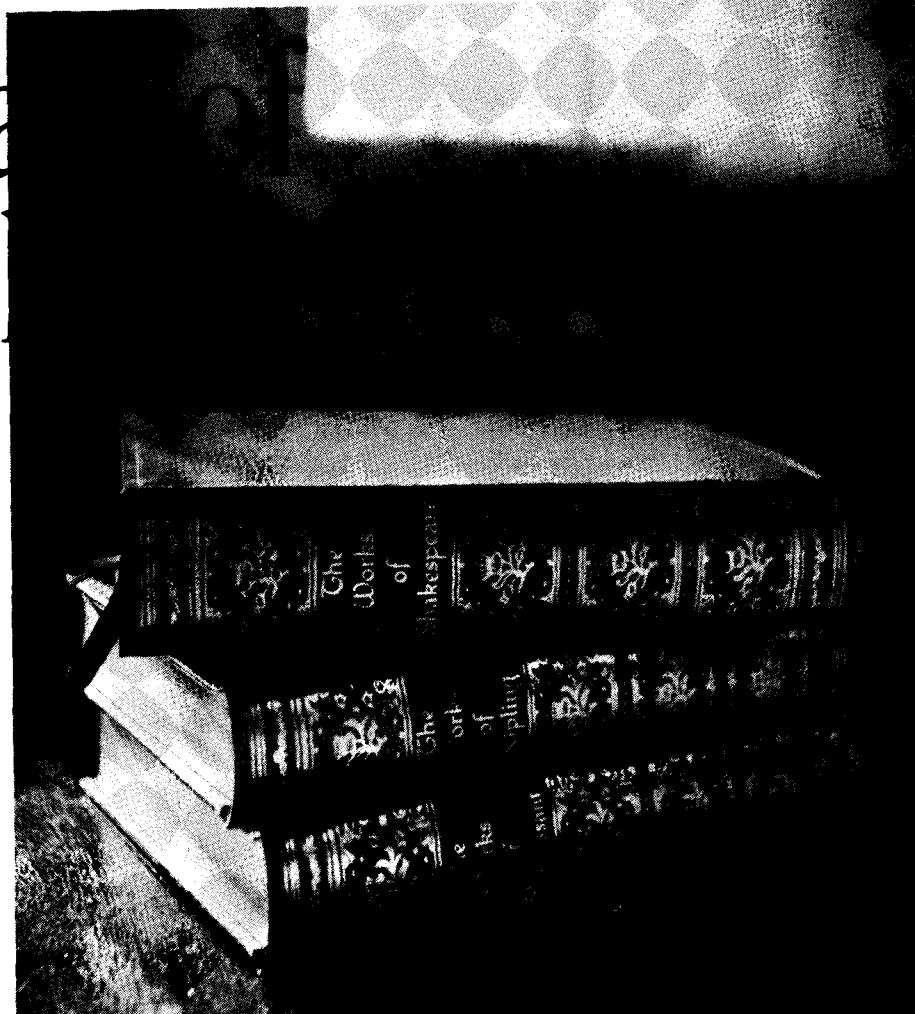
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ing of evolution outright and led to John Scopes's conviction in 1925, were overturned by the Supreme Court in 1968, but not before they had exerted a chilling effect upon teaching for forty years. (Evolution is the indispensable organizing principle of the life sciences, but I did not hear the word in my 1956 high school biology class. New York City, to be sure, suffered no restrictive ordinances, but publishers, following the principle of the "least common denominator" as a sales strategy, tailored the national editions of their textbooks to the few states that considered it criminal to place an ape on the family escutcheon.) A second attempt to mandate equal time for frankly religious views of life's history passed the Tennessee state legislature in the 1970s but failed a constitutional challenge in the court. This judicial blocking left only one legislative path open—the claim that creationism is a science.

The third strategy had some initial success, and "balanced treatment" acts to equate "evolution science" and "creation science" in classrooms passed the Arkansas and Louisiana legislatures in 1981. The ACLU has sued for a federal-court ruling on the Louisiana law's constitutionality, and a trial is likely this year. The Arkansas law was challenged by the ACLU in 1981, on behalf of local plaintiffs (including twelve practicing theologians who felt more threatened by the bill than many scientists did). Federal Judge William R. Overton heard the Arkansas case in Little Rock last December. I spent the better part of a day on the stand, a witness for the prosecution, testifying primarily about how the fossil record refutes "flood geology" and supports evolution.

On January 5, Judge Overton delivered his eloquent opinion, declaring the Arkansas act unconstitutional because so-called "creation science" is only a version of Genesis read literally—a partisan (and narrowly sectarian) religious view, barred from public-school classrooms by the First Amendment. Legal language is often incomprehensible, but sometimes it is charming, and I enjoyed the wording of Overton's decision: "... judgment is hereby entered in favor of the plaintiffs and against the defendants. The relief prayed for is granted."

Support for Overton's equation of "creation science" with strident and sectarian fundamentalism comes from two sources. First, the leading creationists themselves released some frank private

documents in response to plaintiffs' subpoenas. Overton's long list of citations seems to brand the claim for scientific creationism as simple hypocrisy. For example, Paul Ellwanger, the tireless advocate and drafter of the "model bill" that became Arkansas Act 590 of 1981, the law challenged by the ACLU, says in a letter to a state legislator that "I view this whole battle as one between God and anti-God forces, though I know there are a large number of evolutionists who believe in God. . . . it behooves Satan to do all he can to thwart our efforts. . . ." In another letter, he refers to "the idea of killing evolution instead of playing these debating games that we've been playing for nigh over a decade al-

cluding the occurrence of a worldwide flood."

CREATIONISM REVEALS ITS nonscientific character in two ways: its central tenets cannot be tested and its peripheral claims, which can be tested, have been proven false. At its core, the creationist account rests on "singularities"—that is to say, on miracles. The creationist God is not the noble clock-winder of Newton and Boyle, who set the laws of nature properly at the beginning of time and then released direct control in full confidence that his initial decisions would require no revision. He is, instead, a constant presence, who suspends his own laws when necessary to make the new or destroy the old. Since science can treat only natural phenomena occurring in a context of invariant natural law, the constant invocation of miracles places creationism in another realm.

We have already seen how Whitcomb and Morris remove a divine finger from the dike of heaven to flood the earth from their vapor canopy. But the miracles surrounding Noah's flood do not stop there; two other supernatural assists are required. First, God acted "to gather the animals into the Ark." (The Bible tells us [Genesis 6:20] that they found their own way.) Second, God intervened to keep the animals "under control during the year of the Flood." Whitcomb and Morris provide a long disquisition on hibernation and suspect that some divinely ordained state of suspended animation relieved Noah's small and aged crew of most responsibility for feeding and cleaning (poor Noah himself was 600 years old at the time).

In candid moments, leading creationists will admit that the miraculous character of origin and destruction precludes a scientific understanding. Morris writes (and Judge Overton quotes): "God was there when it happened. We were not there. . . . Therefore, we are completely limited to what God has seen fit to tell us, and this information is in His written Word." Duane Gish, the leading creationist author, says: "We do not know how the Creator created, what processes He used, for He used processes which are not now operating anywhere in the natural universe. . . . We cannot discover by scientific investigation anything about the creative processes used by God." When pressed about these quotes, creationists tend to admit that they are pur-



ready—a reasonably clear statement of the creationists' ultimate aims, and an identification of their appeals for "equal time," "the American way of fairness," and "presenting them both and letting the kids decide" as just so much rhetoric.

The second source of evidence of the bill's unconstitutionality lies in the logic and character of creationist arguments themselves. The flood story is central to all creationist systems. It also has elicited the only specific and testable theory the creationists have offered; for the rest, they have only railed against evolutionary claims. The flood story was explicitly cited as one of the six defining characteristics of "creation science" in Arkansas Act 590: "explanation of the earth's geology by catastrophism, in-

veying religion after all, but then claim that evolution is equally religious. Gish also says: "Creationists have repeatedly stated that neither creation nor evolution is a scientific theory (and each is equally religious)." But as Judge Overton reasoned, if creationists are merely complaining that evolution is religion, then they should be trying to eliminate it from the schools, not struggling to get their own brand of religion into science classrooms as well. And if, instead, they are asserting the validity of their own version of natural history, they must be able to prove, according to the demands of science, that creationism is scientific.

Scientific claims must be testable; we must, in principle, be able to envision a set of observations that would render them false. Miracles cannot be judged by this criterion, as Whitcomb and Morris have admitted. But is all creationist writing merely about untestable singularities? Are arguments never made in proper scientific form? Creationists do offer some testable statements, and these are amenable to scientific analysis. Why, then, do I continue to claim that creationism isn't science? Simply because these relatively few statements have been tested and conclusively refuted. Dogmatic assent to disproved claims is not scientific behavior. Scientists are as stubborn as the rest of us, but they must be able to change their minds.

In "flood geology," we find our richest source of testable creationist claims. Creationists have been forced into this uncharacteristically vulnerable stance by a troubling fact too well known to be denied: namely, that the geological record of fossils follows a single, invariant order throughout the world. The oldest rocks contain only single-celled creatures; invertebrates dominate later strata, followed by the first fishes, then dinosaurs, and finally large mammals. One might be tempted to take a "liberal," or allegorical, view of Scripture and identify this sequence with the order of creation in Genesis 1, allowing millions or billions of years for the "days" of Moses. But creationists will admit no such reconciliation. Their fundamentalism is absolute and uncompromising. If Moses said "days," he meant periods of twenty-four hours, to the second. (Creationist literature is often less charitable to liberal theology than to evolution. As a subject for wrath, nothing matches the enemy within.)

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all creatures once must have lived simultaneously on the earth. How, then, did their fossil remains get sorted into an invariable order in the earth's strata? To resolve this particularly knotty dilemma, creationists invoke Noah's flood: all creatures were churned together in the great flood and their fossilized succession reflects the order of their settling as the waters receded. But what natural processes would produce such a predictable order from a singular chaos? The testable proposals of "flood geology" have been advanced to explain the causes of this sorting.

Whitcomb and Morris offer three suggestions. The first—hydrological—holds that denser and more streamlined objects would have descended more rapidly and should populate the bottom strata (in conventional geology, the oldest strata). The second—ecological—envisions a sorting responsive to environment. Denizens of the ocean bottom were overcome by the flood waters first, and should lie in the lower strata; inhabitants of mountaintops postponed their inevitable demise, and now adorn our upper strata. The third—anatomical or functional—argues that certain animals, by their high intelligence or superior mobility, might have struggled successfully for a time, and ended up at the top.

All three proposals have been proven false. The lower strata abound in delicate, floating creatures, as well as spherical globs. Many oceanic creatures—whales and teleost fishes in particular—appear only in upper strata, well above hordes of terrestrial forms. Clumsy sloths (not to mention hundreds of species of marine invertebrates) are restricted to strata lying well above others that serve as exclusive homes for scores of lithe and nimble small dinosaurs and pterosaurs.

The very invariance of the universal fossil sequence is the strongest argument against its production in a single gulp. Could exceptionless order possibly arise from a contemporaneous mixture by such dubious processes of sorting? Surely, somewhere, at least one courageous trilobite would have paddled on valiantly (as its colleagues succumbed) and won a place in the upper strata. Surely, on some primordial beach, a man would have suffered a heart attack and been washed into the lower strata before intelligence had a chance to plot temporary escape. But if the strata represent vast stretches of sequential time, then



invariant order is an expectation, not a problem. No trilobite lies in the upper strata because they all perished 225 million years ago. No man keeps lithified company with a dinosaur, because we were still 60 million years in the future when the last dinosaur perished.

TRUE SCIENCE AND religion are not in conflict. The history of approaches to Noah's flood by scientists who were also professional theologians provides an excellent example of this important truth—and also illustrates just how long ago "flood geology" was conclusively laid to rest by religious scientists. I have argued that direct invocation of miracles and unwillingness to abandon a false doctrine deprive modern creationists of their self-proclaimed status as scientists. When we examine how the great scientist-theologians of past centuries treated the flood, we note that their work is distinguished by both a conscious refusal to admit miraculous events into their explanatory schemes and a willingness to abandon preferred hypotheses in the face of geological evidence. They were scientists *and* religious leaders—and they show us why modern creationists are not scientists.

On the subject of miracles, the Reverend Thomas Burnet published his century's most famous geological treatise in the 1680s, *Telluris theoria sacra* (*The Sacred Theory of the Earth*). Burnet accepted the Bible's truth, and set out to construct a geological history that would be in accord with the events of Genesis.

But he believed something else even more strongly: that, as a scientist, he must follow natural law and scrupulously avoid miracles. His story is fanciful by modern standards: the earth originally was devoid of topography, but was drying and cracking; the cracks served as escape vents for internal fluids, but rain sealed the cracks, and the earth, transformed into a gigantic pressure cooker, ruptured its surface skin; surging internal waters inundated the earth, producing Noah's flood. Bizarre, to be sure, but bizarre precisely because Burnet would not abandon natural law. It is not easy to force a preconceived story into the strictures of physical causality. Over and over again, Burnet acknowledges that his task would be much simpler if only he could invoke a miracle. Why weave such a complex tale to find water for the flood in a physically acceptable manner, when God might simply have made new water for his cataclysmic purification? Many of Burnet's colleagues urged such a course, but he rejected it as inconsistent with the methods of "natural philosophy" (the word "science" had not yet entered English usage):

They say in short that God Almighty created waters on purpose to make the Deluge . . . And this, in a few words, is the whole account of the business. This is to cut the knot when we cannot loose it.

Burnet's God, like the deity of Newton and Boyle, was a clock-winder, not a bungler who continually perturbed his own system with later corrections.

We think him a better Artist that makes a Clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the Springs and Wheels which he puts in the work, than he that hath so made his Clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike: And if one should contrive a piece of Clockwork so that it should beat all the hours, and make all its motions regularly for such a time, and that time being come, upon a signal given, or a Spring toucht, it should of its own accord fall all to pieces; would not this be look'd upon as a piece of greater Art, than if the Workman came at that time prefixt, and with a great Hammer beat it into pieces?

Flood geology was considered and tested by early-nineteenth-century geologists. They never believed that a single flood had produced all fossil-bearing strata, but they did accept and then dis-

The uneasy road of the great writer

Great writers may be born to be great writers, but that doesn't necessarily make it easy for them to make their way in the world.

First, someone has to discover them. Second, someone has to publish them, not once, but several times. Third, someone has to keep reminding them that they have something important on their minds and that there's a world out there waiting for them to put it on paper.

While some potentially great writers may succumb to the heartbreaks of rejection slips and resort to other ways of life as a result, others somehow summon the will to keep writing until someone gives them all the encouragement they need to go on.

The great writers of our time who have needed someone to urge them on include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Booth Tarkington, Robert Frost, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter, P.G. Wodehouse, Willa Cather, Robert Benchley, J.D. Salinger, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woolcott, Robert Penn Warren, James Thurber, Ogden Nash, S.J. Perelman, Norman Mailer, John Updike, Tom Wolfe, Philip Roth, John Irving, Saul Bellow and E.L. Doctorow.

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and found was, in every case, a magazine, for it was a magazine that published their work when the going was toughest and then cajoled and pestered them for more.

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prove a claim that the uppermost strata contained evidence for a single, catastrophic, worldwide inundation. The science of geology arose in nations that were glaciated during the great ice ages, and glacial deposits are similar to the products of floods. During the 1820s, British geologists carried out an extensive empirical program to test whether these deposits represented the action of a single flood. The work was led by two ministers, the Reverend Adam Sedgwick (who taught Darwin his geology) and the Reverend William Buckland. Buckland initially decided that all the "superficial gravels" (as these deposits were called) represented a single event, and he published his *Reliquiae diluvianae* (*Relics of the Flood*) in 1824. However, Buckland's subsequent field work proved that the superficial gravels were not contemporaneous but represented several different events (multiple ice ages, as we now know). Geology proclaimed no worldwide flood but rather a long sequence of local events. In one of the great statements in the history of science, Sedgwick, who was Buckland's close colleague in both science and theology, publicly abandoned flood geology—and upheld empirical science—in his presidential address to the Geological Society of London in 1831.

Having been myself a believer, and, to the best of my power, a propagator of what I now regard as a philosophic heresy, and having more than once been quoted for opinions I do not now maintain, I think it right, as one of my last acts before I quit this Chair, thus publicly to read my recantation . . .

There is, I think, one great negative conclusion now incontestably established—that the vast masses of diluvial gravel, scattered almost over the surface of the earth, do not belong to one violent and transitory period . . .

We ought, indeed, to have paused before we first adopted the diluvian theory, and referred all our old superficial gravel to the action of the Mosaic flood . . . In classing together distant unknown formations under one name; in giving them a simultaneous origin, and in determining their date, not by the organic remains we had discovered, but by those we expected hypothetically hereafter to discover, in them; we have given one more example of the passion with which the mind fastens upon general conclusions, and



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of the readiness with which it leaves the consideration of unconnected truths.

As I prepared to leave Little Rock last December, I went to my hotel room to gather my belongings and found a man sitting backward on my commode, pulling it apart with a plumber's wrench. He explained to me that a leak in the room below had caused part of the ceiling to collapse and he was seeking the source of the water. My commode, located just above, was the obvious candidate, but his hypothesis had failed, for my equipment was working perfectly. The plumber then proceeded to give me a fascinating disquisition on how a professional traces the pathways of water through hotel pipes and walls. The account was perfectly logical and mechanistic: it can come only from here, here, or there, flow this way or that way, and end up there, there, or here. I then asked him what he thought of the trial across the street, and he confessed his staunch creationism, including his firm belief in the miracle of Noah's flood.

As a professional, this man never doubted that water has a physical source and a mechanically constrained path of motion—and that he could use the principles of his trade to identify causes. It would be a poor (and unemployed) plumber indeed who suspected that the laws of engineering had been suspended whenever a puddle and cracked plaster bewildered him. Why should we approach the physical history of our earth any differently?

—Stephen Jay Gould

Stephen Jay Gould's most recent book is *The Mismeasure of Man*.

LONDON RENEWED CONFIDENCE

For British policy-makers, the war over the Falklands seems to have ended twenty-five years of self-doubt



THE FALKLANDS CONFLICT has been Britain's war of independence—not simply the independence of the islanders from the tyranny of rule by an Argentine fascist regime but the greater independence of Britain from friends and allies.

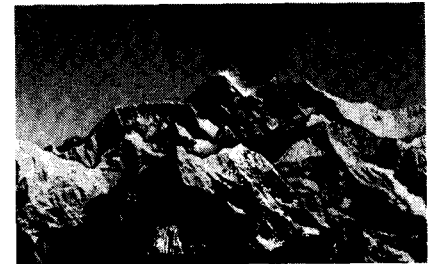
In this sense the Falklands episode has reversed the judgment created by Suez, when Britain and France conspired with Israel to invade Egypt after its seizure of the Canal. This is not to suggest that victory in the South Atlantic in 1982 was necessary to obliterate the memory of humiliation in the Middle East a quarter of a century ago. Any direct comparison between the two crises is very wide of the mark. But certain attitudes were inculcated in British ruling circles and in public opinion by the Suez fiasco, and it is these that have now been reversed.

A Briton of my generation, which has reached middle age, has seen dramatic changes in the country's international standing and self-respect during his lifetime. As a young boy at school before World War II, he was accustomed to be told that he had the privilege of being at the heart of the greatest empire on earth: so much of the map was painted red. When war came, it seemed natural that Britain should play a starring role. The part played by its allies was well known, but victory brought a sense of national achievement as well as a recognition of international collaboration. For all the sufferings of economic depression and the destruction of war, the Britain of my boyhood was a confident country.

The impression was always more glorious than the reality. The empire had begun to wither away before Hitler marched in 1939. By the end of the war, Britain no longer enjoyed the position of equal power implied by the familiar photographs of Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill seated together at their summit conferences. But the assumption that we were a great power remained. Reality overtook the impression only with the failure of the Suez enterprise. It was an ill-judged venture, undertaken by a sick prime minister, and it deserved to fail. But the conclusions the British people drew from the failure mattered even more than the failure itself.

Whereas previously they had been deluded by an inflated belief in their power, now they suffered from an exaggerated sense of their weakness. They had gone into the endeavor in collaboration with France and in secret collusion with Israel, but without the prior knowledge, still less the approval, of the United States and other allies. Britain had tried to go it more or less alone, and failed. Therefore, it was concluded, Britain in the future could act effectively only in partnership. As self-confidence seeped away, keeping

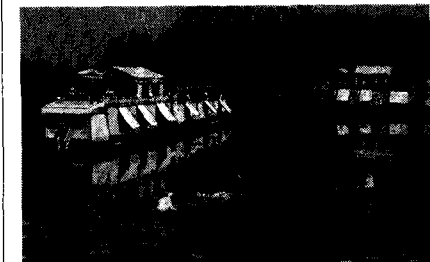
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in step was to become a British preoccupation.

But in step with whom? The failure of Suez was attributed principally to the attempt to act without the backing, or even the acquiescence, of the United States. In that sense, the episode seemed to illustrate the importance of the special relationship between the U.S. and Britain. Yet the attitude of the American government during the crisis and afterward suggested that the relationship was not seen in Washington to be so special after all. The effect was to leave Britain feeling particularly reliant on American advice yet no longer trusting in the solidity of the American connection.

Partly in response to American pressure, but even more because there seemed nowhere else to go, Britain reluctantly turned toward the European Community. Britain could have been an original signatory of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which set up the Community, but declined in the belief that the experiment would fail. By 1961, however, Harold Macmillan's Conservative Government had concluded that Britain could not afford either economically or politically to be excluded from the Community. The first British application for membership came to nothing when De Gaulle imposed his famous, or notorious, veto in 1963 with the explanation that if Britain were to join, the Community "would see itself faced with problems of economic relations with all kinds of states, and most of all with the United States. It

could be foreseen that the cohesion of its members, who would be very numerous and diverse, would not endure for long, and that finally it would appear as a colossal Atlantic community under American domination and direction which would quickly have absorbed the European Community."

This rejection of Britain had a pronounced effect upon British attitudes. Those British people who were most eager to join often felt the need to demonstrate that they were truly European by being anti-American. In the second volume of his memoirs, *Years of Upheaval*, Henry Kissinger describes this cast of mind in Edward Heath, who as prime minister was finally taking Britain into the Community: "The intimate consultation through which British and American policies had been coordinated during the postwar period was reduced to formal diplomatic exchanges. Heath disdained the occasional telephone calls I urged upon the British Ambassadors to establish the personal relationship that Nixon craved, lest he be accused by France, as his predecessor Harold Macmillan had been, of being an American 'Trojan horse.'"

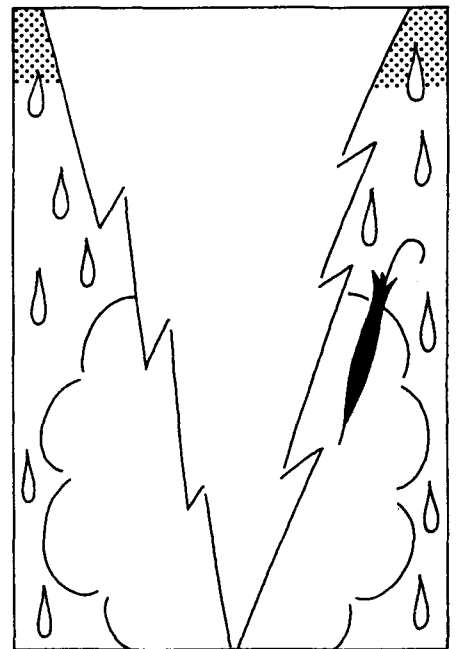
Dr. Kissinger believes that there was an almost heroic streak to Mr. Heath's policy: "He sought to alter not simply a diplomatic pattern but the attitude of his people. The heart of most Britons was with America and the Commonwealth." Perhaps an element of personal heroism was indeed at work, because Mr. Heath believed passionately in the course he had set. But for Britain as a country it was a sign of insecurity to seek acceptance in Europe by repressing its natural instincts.

Successive British leaders have attempted either to distance themselves artificially from the United States or to ingratiate themselves with whatever administration has been in power in Washington. Both attitudes are part of the chain reaction from Suez. So too was the British decision, in 1968, to withdraw from all defense positions east of Suez by December of 1971. In each case, Britain was reacting, probably over-reacting, to a sense of its diminished power in the world. It could not operate effectively by itself, only with friends. Therefore, it must withdraw from unilateral endeavors and overextended positions, and court the best friends it could find. The attitude has been consistent, even if the policy has not.

THIS IS THE attitude that has been changed by the Falklands conflict. It could hardly have been predicted that the British would respond as they did when Argentina seized the islands. The decision to send such a task force on an operation of that nature 8,000 miles from home was a remarkable act of military daring. But much more extraordinary was the psychological response of the British people. There was throughout the crisis a strange interaction between political leaders and the public. The sense of popular outrage at the humiliation inflicted on Britain, which was reflected in the dramatic criticisms of ministers in the special House of Commons debate on the Saturday immediately after the invasion, ensured that government policy would be vigorous. The strength of that policy, and the justifications for it given by ministers, further hardened public opinion.

As military activity increased, so the readiness to seek a solution by military means grew. As casualties were suffered, so the willingness to risk further casualties rose. This was evident from the opinion polls. It could not be explained by sentimental attachment to the islands themselves. Before the crisis broke, most British people would have felt rather pleased with themselves if they could have found the Falklands on the map, even though the islanders are of British stock.

Beneath the proper determination that the islanders, as people for whom Britain was responsible, should not be



A Simplified Income Tax

Imagine an income tax so simple and straightforward that all you do is add up your income for the year and send a modest percentage of it to Uncle Sam. No deductions. No shelters. No loopholes. The same rate would apply to all, across the board.

The idea of a flat-rate tax has been around for years. Today it's bubbling up afresh in the mounting frustration over budget deficits and the nation's economic troubles, along with public disaffection with the existing tax system.

The flat tax has supporters in both parties and across the political spectrum. Several bills on it have been introduced in Congress. The tax rates being discussed generally range below 25%. The top rate is now 50%.

Advocates see the flat tax as a way to stimulate productive enterprise and steer the economy back on a growth path. The idea is that people would be encouraged to work harder, take greater risks, and invest and save more because they'd be able to keep more of what they earned. No longer would they be taxed at ever-higher rates as their income rose.

In addition, proponents say, there would be more equity in the tax system. All would pay their fair share. Shelters and loopholes would be done away with. Cheating through fraudulent deductions would be eliminated.

In pure form, a flat tax would have no exemptions or deductions. But purity would have to give way to practicality. There should be an element of progres-

siveness: higher rates for higher income earners.

Most current discussion centers on providing for a base of exempt income. The exemption, for example, could be the first \$10,000 of income. With a flat rate of 10%, someone with an income of \$20,000 would pay a tax of \$1,000. The effective rate would be 5%. A person with \$100,000 in income would pay a tax of \$9,000, or an effective rate of 9%.

Greater progressivity could be achieved through a tax of two or three tiers. One proposal calls for no tax on income below \$17,500, a rate of 18% on incomes from \$17,500 to \$50,000, and 25% above \$50,000.

Numerous options are being discussed. One is to have no income exempted from taxation. Instead, each person would get a \$250 tax credit. For a family of four, total credit of \$1,000 would be equivalent to an exemption of \$10,000, given a 10% rate.

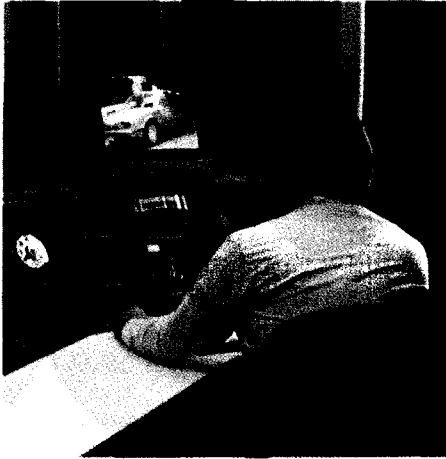
Arriving at a simple flat tax would be anything but simple. State and local governments depend on their ability to issue tax-free bonds. Institutions, organizations, and causes of all sorts need contributions that are now tax-deductible. Homeowners cherish the deductibility of their mortgage interest. All these things would have to be worked out carefully.

A streamlined tax has considerable appeal in its potential for simplicity, fairness, and revenue-raising effectiveness. It's an idea that merits full scrutiny and debate.



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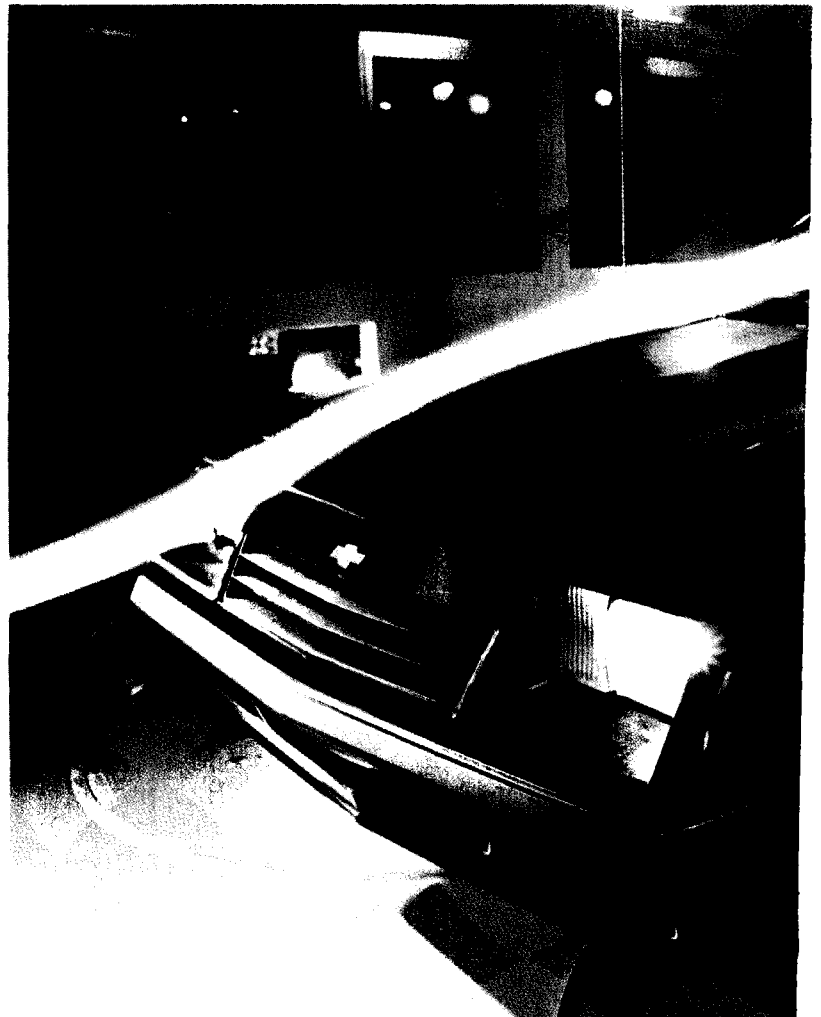
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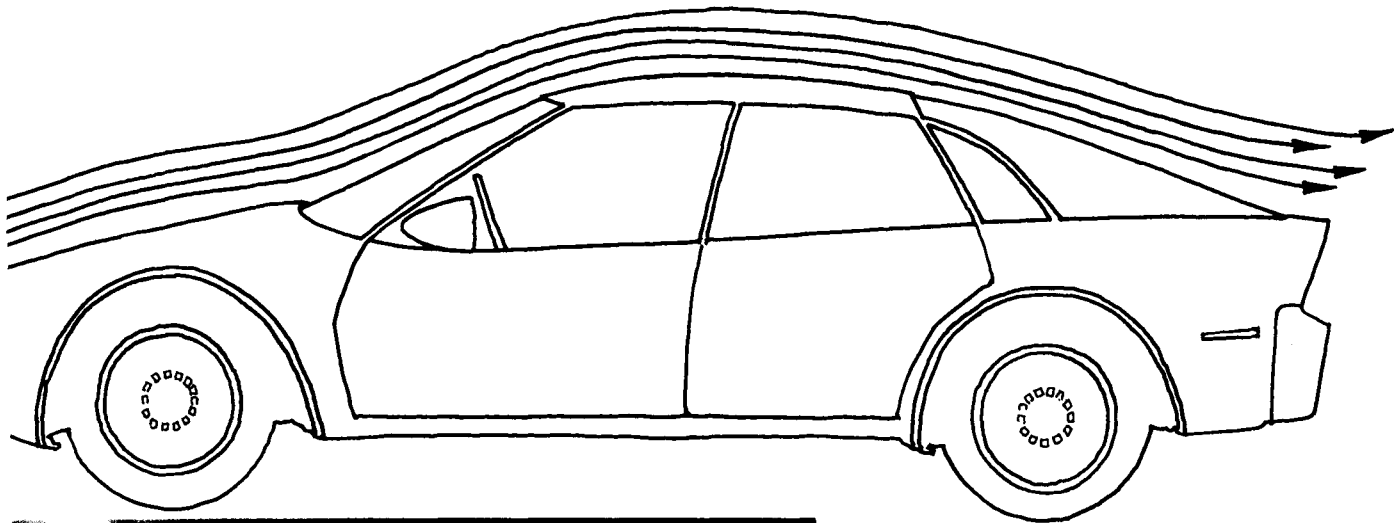
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deprived of their freedom was another, even deeper resolve: that Britain itself should not be pushed around anymore. Only this can explain the remarkable upsurge of overt patriotism among generations that were thought to be contemptuous of such outdated feelings. In the aftermath of victory, four out of five people in an opinion poll said that it had made them more proud to be British. Some of the euphoria inevitably evaporates as passions cool, but not all of it is the emotion of a moment.

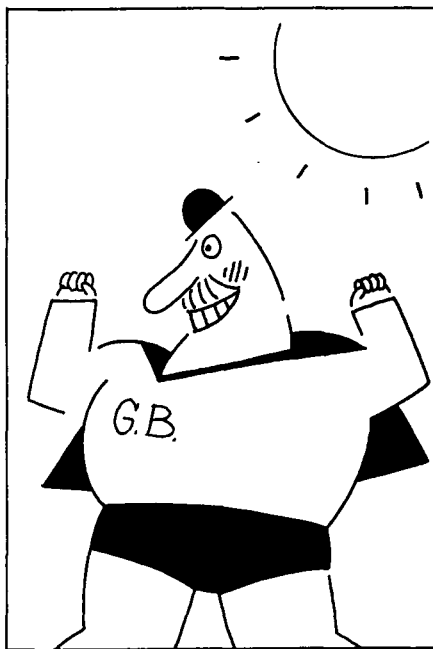
Britain received assistance during the conflict, at different times and in varying measure, from its European partners, from the United States, and from others. But the victory is seen in Britain as having been won by British political determination through British force of arms. Had Britain succumbed to the wishes of its allies it might be waiting still for a diplomatic compromise rather than having pushed on to recapture the islands. The episode is therefore regarded as evidence that Britain can act by itself to safeguard its interests, that it does not need a seal of approval from its major allies before it can move, and that it will sometimes be better off if it does not listen to the advice of its friends.

Renewed self-reliance has not led to the outbreak of anti-American sentiment that might have been expected. A recent opinion poll found that as many as 63 percent of British people were satisfied with the support given by the United States during the dispute. That judgment may seem, even to many Americans, to err on the side of generosity. But there is no reason to doubt that it is an accurate reflection of British opinion. I was in the United States for the first fortnight of the crisis, and I encountered at least as much criticism in Washington and New York of the Reagan Administration's attempts at mediation as I did later in London. On the whole, British opinion has been remarkably understanding about the multiple pressures on the United States. It is recognized that Washington's concern for the Western Hemisphere is not unreasonable, and does not imply a hostility toward Britain.

Such a calm acceptance of international realities suggests, though, that the realities of the Anglo-American relationship have been acknowledged. There could never be an exclusive attachment in the modern world between a superpower and a nation of the middle rank.

American interests are worldwide, and Britain has its partnership with the other members of the European Community, to say nothing of the old links with the Commonwealth. A special bond between the two countries—founded upon sentiment, habit, and shared attitudes—remains. But the Falklands dispute has revealed that the attachment is not accorded absolute priority.

The new independence has particular implications for Britain in the field of defense. Ever since the formation of NATO, British defense policy has been based on the assumption that its interests are linked indissolubly with those of the United States. The assumption did not hold up in the Falklands crisis.



American practical assistance became increasingly valuable as the dispute went on, yet the outcome would have been different if Britain had had to rely upon the United States instead of upon itself. Perhaps it will be different next time. Perhaps the United States can always be depended upon to defend Britain against the Soviet Union. But it will not be surprising in the future if Britain does not take too much on trust.

The case for replacing Polaris missiles with Tridents, so that Britain can retain an independent nuclear deterrent capable of inflicting unacceptable damage upon the Soviet Union, has been strengthened immeasurably. So too has the case for a stronger British navy, and, indeed, the need for some expansion of the navy has been accepted by the Gov-

ernment. This is the Falklands lesson that public and parliamentary opinion seized upon—all the more eagerly because it conflicts with what has been the declared strategy of the British Government. But if the navy is to be strengthened, over and above replacing the losses of the war, and if Trident is to be purchased, the cost will be considerable. Some additional increase in British defense expenditure is now politically acceptable in the light of the Falklands. But there will still have to be compensating economies. BAOR (the British Army on the Rhine) has been regarded as sacrosanct, because the allies, especially those on the continent of Europe, would be upset if it were reduced in size. In the post-Falklands atmosphere, such reasoning will no longer seem so persuasive. No merit will be seen in giving needless offense to allies, but there will be a greater determination to base British policies on British assessments.

In one respect, this may be pleasing to the United States. Successive American administrations have regretted Britain's withdrawal from defense activities outside the NATO area. Now the diminishment of British ambitions has halted. Britain will never again play the extensive international role that it did even twenty years ago, and the military part that it can play around the world will remain severely limited by considerations of cost, but now Britain is psychologically attuned to the possibility of occasionally using its forces once again in distant places.

THE MOST IMPORTANT effect of the Falklands will not, however, be felt on policy questions that can be foreseen. It will emerge in changed attitudes that will govern the response to new issues. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Margaret Thatcher, the architect of the new approach, is the first prime minister to have begun a parliamentary career since Suez. Moreover, while many of her domestic policies upset her countrymen, and while her foreign policies have in the past often contradicted established opinion in Britain, her instincts on international affairs usually accord with those of the general public. She is essentially a British nationalist. She believes in a strong defense. She wants to keep Britain in the European Community, but she is not enthusiastic about it and is determined to fight for British interests within it. She believes in maintaining a close

relationship with the United States without being deferential in her approach. Successive Presidents will attest that she is at least as eager to give advice as to receive it.

Her approach is likely to lead to further conflict of a limited nature with Europe. The last has by no means been heard of the wearisome disputes over farm prices and the Community budget. But what about Britain's relations with the United States? If the United States can affect neutrality when British territory is invaded, then Britain is under no obligation to prove its devotion to the United States. Because of the disparity in power and wealth, there will no doubt be occasions in the future, as there have been in the past, when Britain will be vulnerable to American pressure. But it will be less inclined to go along for the sake of going along.

Britain today would likely not behave as it did in April, 1980, during the Iranian crisis. The British Government and Parliament then agreed to impose economic sanctions on Iran in an attempt to secure the release of the hostages, even though hardly any minister or any member of Parliament thought that the sanctions would be effective. Disbelief was suspended for the sake of the alliance—which proved to be a lesson in the danger of pursuing a course without conviction, since there followed a humiliating muddle with the rest of the Community over the nature of the sanctions.

It might seem strange that consequences such as I have predicted could flow from a military victory over a third-class power for the repossession of islands of whose very existence most people in the mother country had been only dimly aware a few months before. But apparently small events can have broad effects when they touch the nerve of a nation. Just as the British read too much into their failure at Suez, so might they conclude too much from their success in the Falklands. Their need of friends and allies is just as great as it was before the Argentine invasion. But it will be no bad thing if the British deal more confidently with those friends and allies than has been their practice for some years now. Overconfidence has not been a quality from which the British have suffered in recent times.

— *Geoffrey Smith*

Geoffrey Smith is a political columnist and editorial writer for the London Times.

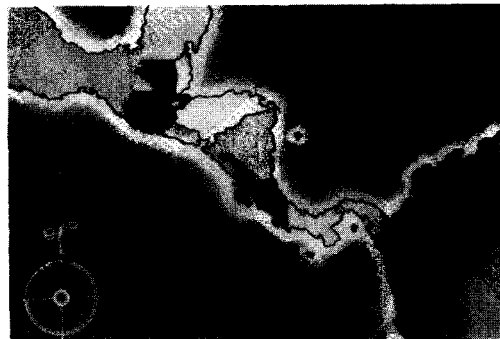
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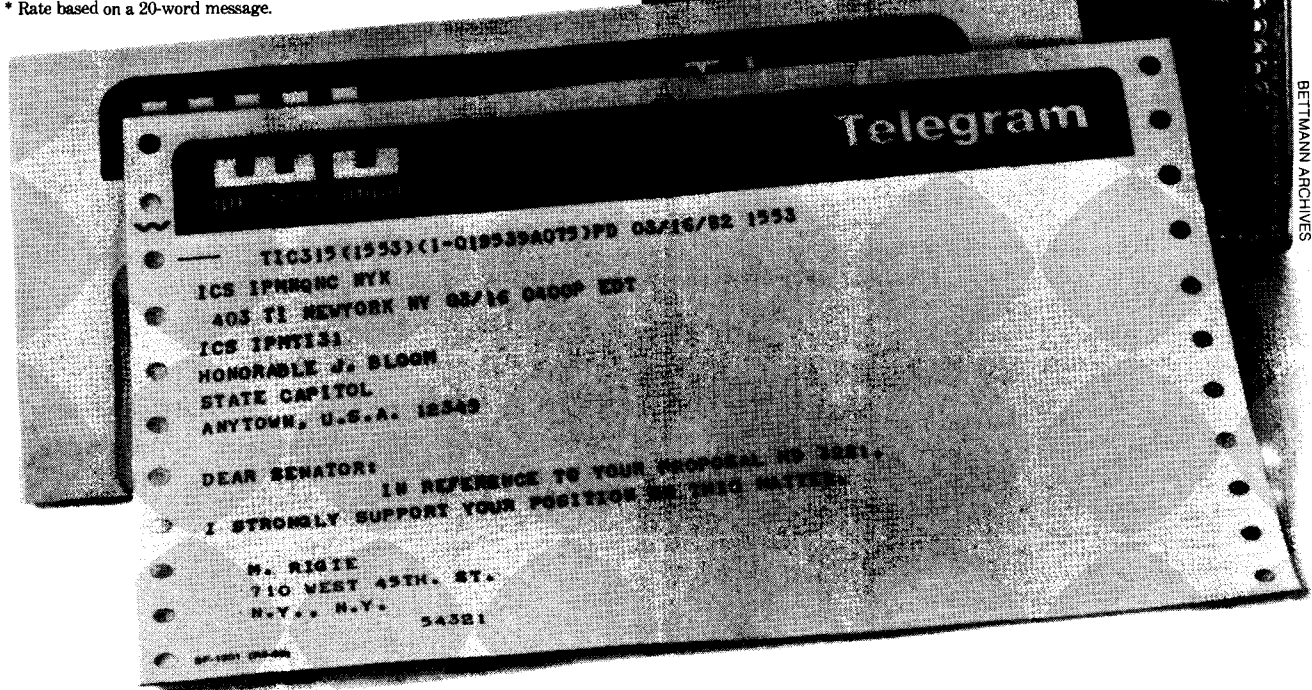
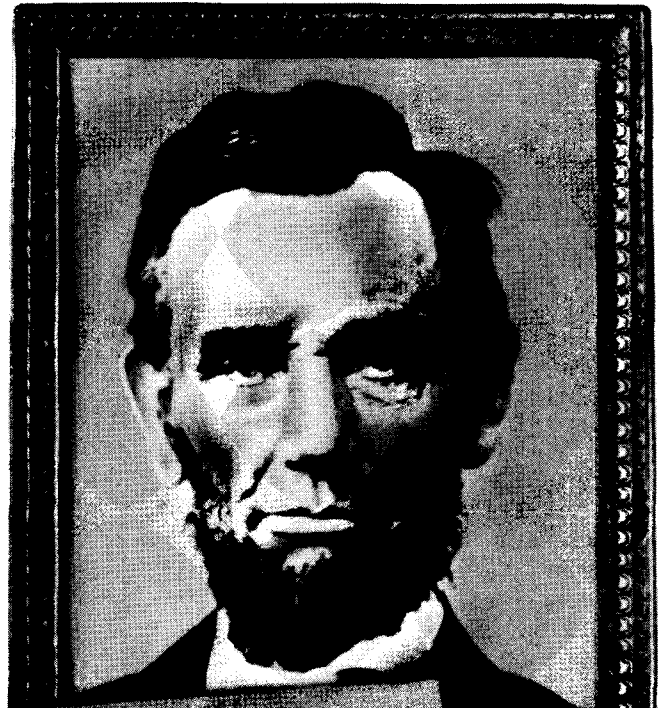
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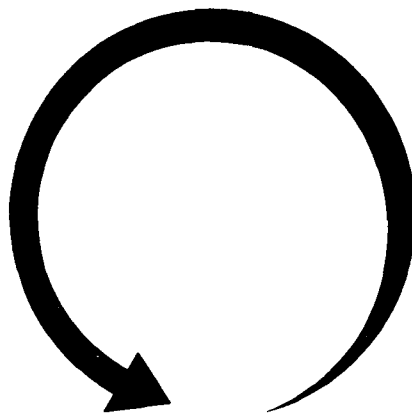
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A journey into America

BLUE HIGHWAYS

BY WILLIAM LEAST HEAT MOON



THE IDEA CAME TO ME ON FEBRUARY 17, A DAY OF canceled expectations: the day I learned my job teaching English was finished because of declining enrollment at the college; the day I called my wife, from whom I'd been separated for nine months, to give her the news; the day she let slip about her "friend"—Rick or Dick or Chick. Something like that. I decided that a man who couldn't make things go right could at least go. He could quit trying to get out of the way of life. Chuck routine. Live the real jeopardy of circumstance.

The result: on March 19, the last night of winter, I lay awake in a tangled bed and doubted the wisdom of just walking out on things; I doubted the whole plan that would begin at daybreak—to set out on a long (equivalent to half the circumference of the earth), circular trip over the back roads of the United States. Following a circle would give a purpose—to come around again—where taking a straight line would not. And I was going to do it by living out of the back end of a truck.

The vernal equinox came on gray and quiet, a curiously still morning neither winter nor spring, as if the cycle had paused. Because things go their own way, my daybreak departure turned into a morning departure, then to an afternoon departure. Finally, I climbed into the van, rolled down the window, looked a last time at the rented apartment.

I drove into the street, around the corner, through the intersection, over the bridge, onto the highway. I was

heading toward those little towns that get on the map—if they get on at all—only because some cartographer has a blank space to fill: Remote, Oregon; Simplicity, Virginia; New Freedom, Pennsylvania; New Hope, Tennessee; Why, Arizona; Whynot, Mississippi; Igo, California (just down the road from Ono), here I come.

My father calls himself Heat Moon, my elder brother Little Heat Moon. I, coming last, am therefore Least. It has been a long lesson of a name to learn. To the Siouan peoples, the Moon of Heat is the seventh month, a time also known as the Blood Moon because, I think, of its dusky midsummer color. I have other names: Buck, once a slur—never mind the predominant Anglo features. Also Bill Trogdon. The Christian names come from a grandfather eight generations back, one William Trogdon, an immigrant Lancashireman living in North Carolina, who was killed by the Tories for providing food to rebel patriots and thereby got his name in volume four of *Makers of America*. Yet to the red way of thinking, a man who makes peace with the new by destroying the old is not to be honored. So I hear.

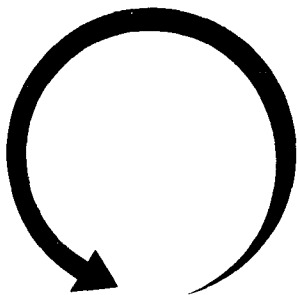
My wife, a woman of striking mixed-blood features, came from the Cherokee. Our battles, my Cherokee and I, we called the "Indian wars."

I named my truck Ghost Dancing, a heavy-handed symbol alluding to ceremonies of the 1890s in which the Plains Indians, wearing cloth shirts they believed rendered them indestructible, danced for the return of warriors, bison, and the fervor of the old life that would sweep away the new. Ghost dances, desperate resurrection rituals, were the dying rattles of people whose last defense was delu-

William Trogdon, of Columbia, Missouri, writes under the name of William Least Heat Moon. A full account of his travels will be published in January by the Atlantic Monthly Press.

sion—about all that remained to them in their futility.

A final detail: On the morning of my departure, I had seen thirty-eight Blood Moons, an age that carries its own madness and futility. With a nearly desperate sense of isolation and a growing suspicion that I lived in an alien land, I took to the open road in search of places where change did not mean ruin and where time and men and deeds connected.



THE FIRST HIGHWAY: INTERSTATE 70 EASTBOUND out of Columbia, Missouri. The road here follows, more or less, the Booneslick Trail, the initial leg of the Oregon Trail; it also parallels both the southern latitude of the last great glacier in central Missouri and the northern boundary of the Osage Nation. The Cherokee and I had skirmished its length in Missouri and Illinois for ten years, and memory made for hard driving that first day of spring. But it was the fastest route east out of the homeland.

Eighty miles on, rain started popping the windshield, and the road became blobby headlights and green interstate signs for this exit, that exit. LAST EXIT TO ELSEWHERE. I crossed the Missouri River not far upstream from where Lewis and Clark on another wet spring afternoon set out for Mr. Jefferson's *terra incognita*. Further to the southeast, under a glowing skullcap of fouled sky, lay St. Louis.

The tumult of St. Louis behind, the Illinois superwide quiet but for the rain, I turned south onto State 4, a short-cut to I-64. After that, the 42,500 miles of straight and wide could lead to hell for all I cared; I was going to stay on the 3 million miles of bent and narrow rural American two-lane, the roads that used to be shown in blue on highway maps to distinguish them from the main routes, in red.

The early darkness came on. My headlamps cut only a forty-foot trail through the rain, and the dashboard lights cast a green glow. Sheet lightning behind the horizon of trees made the sky look like a great faded orange cloth being blown about; then darkness soaked up the light, and, for a moment, I was blinder than before.

In the approaching car beams, raindrops spattering the road became little beacons. I bent over the wheel to steer along the divider stripes. A frog, long-legged and green, belly-flopped across the road to the side where the puddles would be better. The land, still cold and wintry, was alive

with creatures that trusted in the coming of spring.

At Grayville, Illinois, on the Wabash River, I pulled up for the night on North Street and parked in front of the old picture show. The marquee said TRAVELOGUE TODAY, or it would have if both the o's had been there. I should have gone to a café and struck up a conversation, but I stumbled to the bunk in the back of my rig, undressed, zipped into a sleeping bag, and watched things go dark. I fought desolation and wrestled memories of the Indian wars.

First night on the road. I've read that fawns have no scent, so predators cannot track them down. But I heard the past snuffling about somewhere else.

The rain came again in the night and moved on east to leave a morning of cool overcast. Driving through the washed land in my small, self-propelled box—a "wheel estate," a mechanic had called it—I felt clean and almost disentangled. I had what I needed for now, much of it stowed under the wooden bunk:

- 1 sleeping bag and blanket;
- 1 Coleman cooler (empty but for a can of chopped liver a friend had given me so there would *always* be something to eat);
- 1 Rubbermaid basin and a plastic gallon jug (the sink);
- 1 Sears Roebuck portable toilet;
- 1 Optimus 8R white gas cookstove (hardly bigger than a can of beans);
- 1 knapsack of utensils, a pot, a skillet;
- 1 U.S. Navy seabag of clothes;
- 1 tool kit;
- 1 satchel full of notebooks, pens, road atlas, and a micro-cassette recorder;
- 2 Nikon F2 35mm cameras and five lenses;
- 2 vade mecums: Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*.

In my billfold were four gasoline credit cards and twenty-six dollars. Hidden under the dash were the remnants of my savings account: \$428.

Ghost Dancing, a 1975 half-ton Econoline (the smallest van Ford makes), rode self-contained but not self-containing. So I hoped. It had two worn rear tires and an ominous knocking in the water pump. I had converted the van from a clanky tin box into a six-by-ten place at once a bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, parlor. Everything simple and lightweight: no crushed velvet upholstery, no wine racks, no built-in television. It came equipped with power nothing and drove like what it was—a truck. Your basic plumber's model.

The Wabash divides southern Illinois from Indiana. East of the fluvial flood plain, a sense of the unknown, the addiction of the traveler, began seeping in. Abruptly, Pokeberry Creek came and went before I could see it. The interstate afforded easy passage over the Hoosierland, so easy it gave no sense of the up and down of the country; worse, it hid away the people. Life doesn't happen along interstates. It's against the law.

At the Huntingburg exit, I turned off and headed for the

Ohio River. Indiana 66, a road so crooked it could run for the legislature, took me into the hilly fields of CHEW MAIL POUCH barns, past Christ-of-the-Ohio Catholic Church, through the Swiss town of Tell City, with its statue of William and his crossbow and his nervous son. On past the old stone riverfront houses in Cannelton, on up along the Ohio, the muddy bank sometimes not ten feet from the road. The brown water rolled and roiled. Under wooded bluffs I stopped to stretch among the periwinkles. At the edge of a field, Sulphur Spring bubbled up beneath a cover of dead leaves. Shawnees once believed in the curative power of the water, and settlers even bottled it. I cleared the small spring for a taste. Bad enough to cure something.

I crossed into the Eastern Time Zone and then over the Blue River, which was a brown creek. Blue, Green, Red—yes—but whoever heard of a Brown River? For some reason, the farther west the river and the scarcer the water, the more honest the names become: Stinking Water Branch, Dead Horse Fork, Cutthroat Gulch, Damnation Creek. Perhaps the old trailmen and prospectors figured settlers would be slower to build along a river named Calamity.

I took the nearest Ohio River bridge at Louisville and whipped around the city and went into Pewee Valley and on to La Grange, where seven daily Louisville & Nashville freight trains ran right down Main Street. Then southeast.

Curling, dropping, trying to follow a stream, Kentucky 53 looked as if it needed someone to take the slack out. On that gray afternoon the creek ran full and clear under the rock ledges that dripped out the last meltwater. In spite of snowpacks here and about, a woman bent to the planting of a switch of a tree, one man tilled mulch into his garden, another cleaned a birdhouse.

TO WALK MAIN STREET IN SHELBYVILLE, KENTUCKY, is to go down three centuries of American architecture: rough-hewn timber, postbellum brick, Victorian fretwork, 1950s plate glass. Founded in 1792, it's an old town for this part of the country.

At the west end of Main, a man stripping siding from a small, two-story house had exposed a log cabin. I stopped to watch him straighten the doorway. To get a better perspective, he came to the sidewalk, eyed the lintel, then looked at me. "It's tilting, isn't it?" he said.

"There's a little list to it, but you could live with that."

"I want it right." He went to the door, set up a jack, measured, and leaned into it. The timbers creaked and squared up. He propped a couple of two-by-fours under the lintel to hold it true and cranked down the jack. "Come in for a look," he said. "After a hundred and fifty years, she's not likely to fall down today."

"That's before people started jacking around with it."

The interior, bare of plaster and lath, leaked a deep smell of old timbers. Bigger than railway ties, the logs lay

locked in dovetails, all careful work done only with ax, adz, froe, and wedge. The man, Bob Andriot, asked what I thought.

"It's a beauty. How long have you been at it?"

"Ten days. We want to move in the first of April."

"You're going to live here?"

"My wife and I have a picture-framing and interior-design shop. We're moving it out of our house. We just bought this place."

"Did you know the log cabin was underneath the siding?"

"We thought it possible. Shape of the house and the low windows looked right. We knew some were along Main." He went to the window. "That little house across the street—could be one under the siding. A lot of cabins are still buried under asphalt shingles, and nobody knows it. I've heard Kentucky's got more log houses than any other state."

A squarely solid man stepped through a back window. Andriot said, "Tony here got himself one last year in Spencer County."

"But I knew what I was gettin'," Tony said. "It wasn't sided over. Some fellas clearin' a field were discussin' whether to burn the cabin or push it in the holler. We were lookin' for a house, so we bought it and moved it. Only three inches off square, and I know factually it'd been there since 1807. Good for another couple hundred years now."

"Tony's logs are chestnut and a lot more termite-resistant than these poplar logs here," Andriot said. "Somebody let a gutter leak for a long time on the back corner, and termites came up in the wet wood. Now that end's like a rotted tooth, except we can't pull it. So we'll reinforce."

He took me around to the east wall. "Look at this." He pointed to a worn Roman numeral I cut between adz marks into the bottom log. The eighth tier had a VIII scratched in it. "They're numbered, and we don't know why. I don't think it was ever moved. Maybe precut to a plan."

"A prefab nineteenth-century log house?"

"Don't think this was a house originally. Records show it was a coach stop on the old road to Louisville in 1829, but it's probably older. Main Street's always been the highway."

"What about the gaps between the logs?"

Andriot stuck a crowbar between two timbers and pried out a rock caked with mud as hard as the stone. "They chinked with rocks and mud, but we aren't going to be that authentic. We'll leave the rocks but chink with concrete." He locked the crowbar onto a wooden peg, its color much lighter than that of the logs, and pulled it free. "Hand-whittled oak. Sniff it." The peg smelled of freshly cut wood. "You're sniffing a tree from 1776." Andriot touched his nose. "Gives you a real sense of history. Take it with you."

He asked where I was from. Tony listened and asked if I had ever read *Walking Through Missouri on a Mule*.

"Never heard of it, but I like that title."

"It's about an old boy that tramped across the state a hundred years ago. Boy that walked it wrote the book. Now, that's good reading."

A head popped in the window. "Hey, Kirk," Andriot said. "Coke time."

We sat on the plank floor and talked. "You know," Andriot said, "this old place makes a difference here. To us, of course, but to the town, too, before long. I feel it more than I can explain it. I don't know—I guess rescuing this building makes me feel I've done something to last. And people here need to see this old lady. To be reminded."

"Old lady?" Kirk said. "That's not what you were calling her yesterday."

"That was yesterday. She gets better as she gets older."

The men got up to work again, and I shook hands all around.

I drove on east. I thought about how Bob Andriot was rebuilding a past he could see and smell, one he could shape with his hands. He was using it to build something new. I envied him that.

Not out of any plan but just because it lay in front of me, I headed for the bluegrass region. I took an old road, a "pike," the Kentuckians say, since their first highways were toll roads with entrances barred by revolving poles called "turn pikes." I followed the old pike, now Route 421, not out of any plan, either, but because it looked pleasant—a road of white fences around thoroughbred farms.

Along the Leestown Road, near an old whitewashed springhouse made useless by a water-district pipeline, I stopped to eat lunch. Downstream from the spring, where butter once got cooled, the clear rill washed around clumps of new watercress under peeling sycamores. I pulled makings for a sandwich from my haversack: Muenster cheese, a collop of hard salami, sourdough bread, horseradish. I cut a sprig of watercress, laid it on, and then ate slowly, letting the gurgle in the water and the guttural trilling of red-winged blackbirds do the talking. A noisy, whizzing gnat that couldn't decide whether to eat on my sandwich or my ear joined me.

Had I gone looking for some particular place rather than any place, I would never have found this spring under the sycamores. Since leaving home, I felt for the first time at rest. Sitting full in the moment, I practiced the god-awful difficulty of just paying attention. It's a contention of Heat Moon's—believing as he does that any traveler who misses the journey misses about all he's going to get—that a man becomes his attentions. His observations and curiosity, they make and remake him.

Etymology: *curious*, related to *cure*, once meant "carefully observant." Maybe a tonic of curiosity would counter my numbing sense that life inevitably creeps toward the absurd. *Absurd*, by the way, derives from a Latin word

meaning "deaf, dulled." Maybe the road could provide a therapy through observation of the ordinary and obvious, a means whereby the outer eye could open an inner one. STOP, LOOK, LISTEN, the old railroad-crossing signs warned. Whitman calls it "the profound lesson of reception."

THERE IS ONE ALMOST INFALLIBLE WAY TO FIND honest food at just prices in blue-highway America: count the wall calendars in a café.

No calendar: Same as an interstate pit stop.

One calendar: Preprocessed food assembled in New Jersey.

Two calendars: Only if fish trophies are present.

Three calendars: Can't miss on the farmboy breakfasts.

Four calendars: Try the "ho-made" pie, too.

Five calendars: Keep it under your hat, or they'll franchise.

One time I found a six-calendar café in the Ozarks, which served fried chicken, peach pie, and chocolate malts that left me searching for another one ever since. I've never seen a seven-calendar place. But old-time travelers—roadmen in a day when cars had running boards and lunchroom windows said AIR COOLED in blue letters with icicles dripping from the tops—those travelers have told me the golden legends of seven-calendar cafés.

To the rider of back roads, nothing shows the tone, the voice of a small town more quickly than the breakfast grill or the five-thirty tavern. Much of what the people do and believe and share is evident there. The City Café in Gainesboro, Tennessee, had three calendars that I could see from the walk. Inside were no interstate refugees with full bladders and empty tanks, no wild-eyed children just released from the glassy cell of a station wagon back seat, no long-haul truckers talking in CB numbers. There were only townspeople wearing overalls, or catalogue-order suits with five-and-dime ties, or uniforms. That is, there were farmers and mill hands, bank clerks, the dry-goods merchant, a policeman, and the chiropractor's receptionist. Because it was Saturday, there were also mothers and children.

I ordered my standard on-the-road breakfast: two eggs up, hashbrowns, tomato juice. The waitress, whose pale, almost translucent skin shifted hue in the gray light like a thin slice of mother-of-pearl, brought the food. Next to the eggs was a biscuit with a little yellow Smiley button stuck in it. She said, "You from the North?"

"I guess I am." A Missourian gets used to southerners thinking him a Yankee, a northerner considering him a cracker, a westerner sneering at his effete easternness, and an easterner taking him for a cowhand.

"So whata you doin' in the mountains?"

"Talking to people. Taking some pictures. Looking, mostly."

"Lookin' for what?"

"A three-calendar café that serves Smiley buttons on the biscuits."

"You needed a smile. Tell me really."

"I don't know. Actually, I'm looking for some jam to put on this biscuit, now you've brought one."

She came back with grape jelly. In a land of quince jelly, apple butter, apricot jam, blueberry preserves, pear preserves, and lemon marmalade, you always get grape jelly.

"Whata you lookin' for?"

Like anyone else, I'm embarrassed to eat in front of a watcher, particularly if I'm getting interviewed. "Why don't you have a cup of coffee?"

"Cain't right now. You gonna tell me?"

"I don't know how to describe it to you. Call it harmony."

She waited for something more. "Is that it?"

Someone called her to the kitchen. I had managed almost to finish by the time she came back. She sat on the edge of the booth. "I started out in life not likin' anything, but then it grew on me. Maybe that'll happen to you." She watched me spread the jelly. "Saw your van." She watched me eat the biscuit. "You sleep in there?" I told her I did. "I'd love to do that, but I'd be scared spitless."

"I don't mind being scared spitless. Sometimes."

"I'd love to take off cross-country. I like to look at different license plates. But I'd take a dog. You carry a dog?"

"No dogs, no cats, no budgie birds. It's a one-man campaign to show Americans a person can travel alone, without a pet."

"Cain't travel without a dog!"

"I like to do things the hard way."

"Shoot! I'd take me a dog to talk to. And for protection."

"It isn't traveling to cross the country and talk to your pug instead of people along the way. Besides, being alone on the road makes you ready to meet someone when you stop. You get sociable, traveling alone."

She looked out toward the van again. "Time I get the nerve to take a trip, gas'll cost five dollars a gallon."

"Could be. My rig might go the way of the steamboat." I remembered why I'd come to Gainesboro. "You know the way to Nameless?" I had picked Nameless out of my atlas while I sat on my bunk in Livingston, Tennessee, waiting for the rain to stop.

"Nameless? I've heard of Nameless. Better ask the am'lance driver in the corner booth." She pinned the Smiley on my jacket. "Maybe I'll see you on the road somewhere. His name's Bob, by the way."

"The ambulance driver?"

"The Smiley. I always name my Smileys—otherwise they all look alike. I'd talk to him before you go."

"The Smiley?"

"The am'lance driver."

And so I went looking for Nameless, Tennessee, with a Smiley button named Bob.

"I don't know if I got directions for where you're goin',"

the ambulance driver said. "I *think* there's a Nameless down the Shepardsville road."

"When I get to Shepardsville, will I have gone too far?"

"Ain't no Shepardsville."

"How will I know when I'm there?"

"Cain't say for certain."

"What's Nameless look like?"

"Don't recollect."

"Is the road paved?"

"It's possible."

Those were the directions. I was looking for an unnumbered road named after a nonexistent town which would take me to a place called Nameless that nobody was sure existed.

Clumps of wild garlic lined the county highway that I hoped was the Shepardsville road. It scrimmaged with the mountain as it tried to stay on top of the ridges; the hill-sides were so steep and thick with oak, I felt as if I were following a trail through the misty treetops. Chickens ran across the road, doing more work with their necks than their legs, and, with a battering of wings, half leaped and half flew into the lower branches of the oaks. A vicious pair of German shepherds raced along trying to eat the tires. After miles, I decided I'd missed the town—assuming there truly *was* a Nameless, Tennessee.

I stopped beside a big man loading tools in a pickup. "I may be lost."

"Where'd you lose the right road?"

"I don't know. Somewhere around 1965."

"Highway 56, you mean?"

"I came down 56. I think I should've turned at the last junction."

"Only thing down that road's stumps and huckleberries, and the berries ain't there in March. Where you tryin' to get to?"

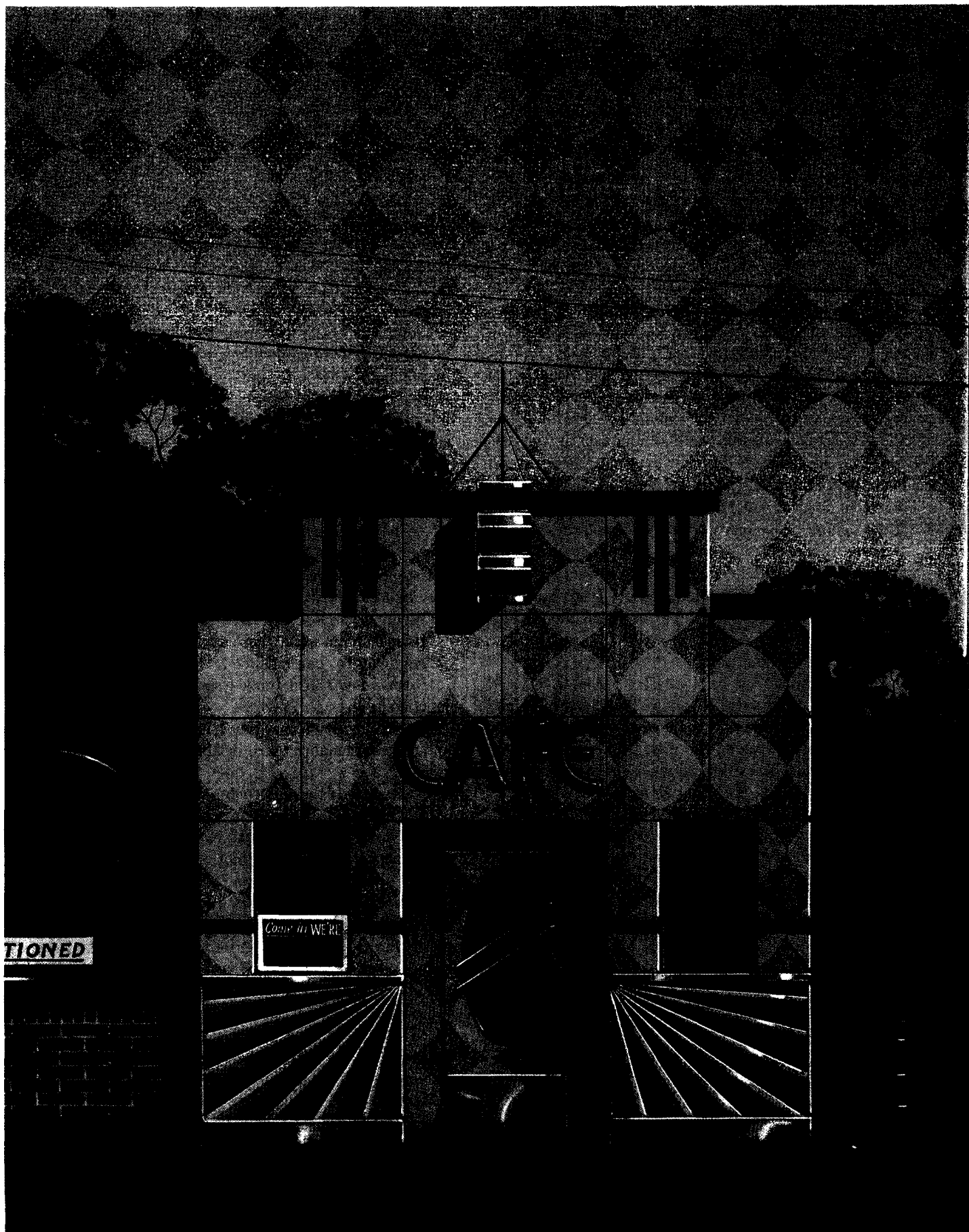
"Nameless. If there is such a place."

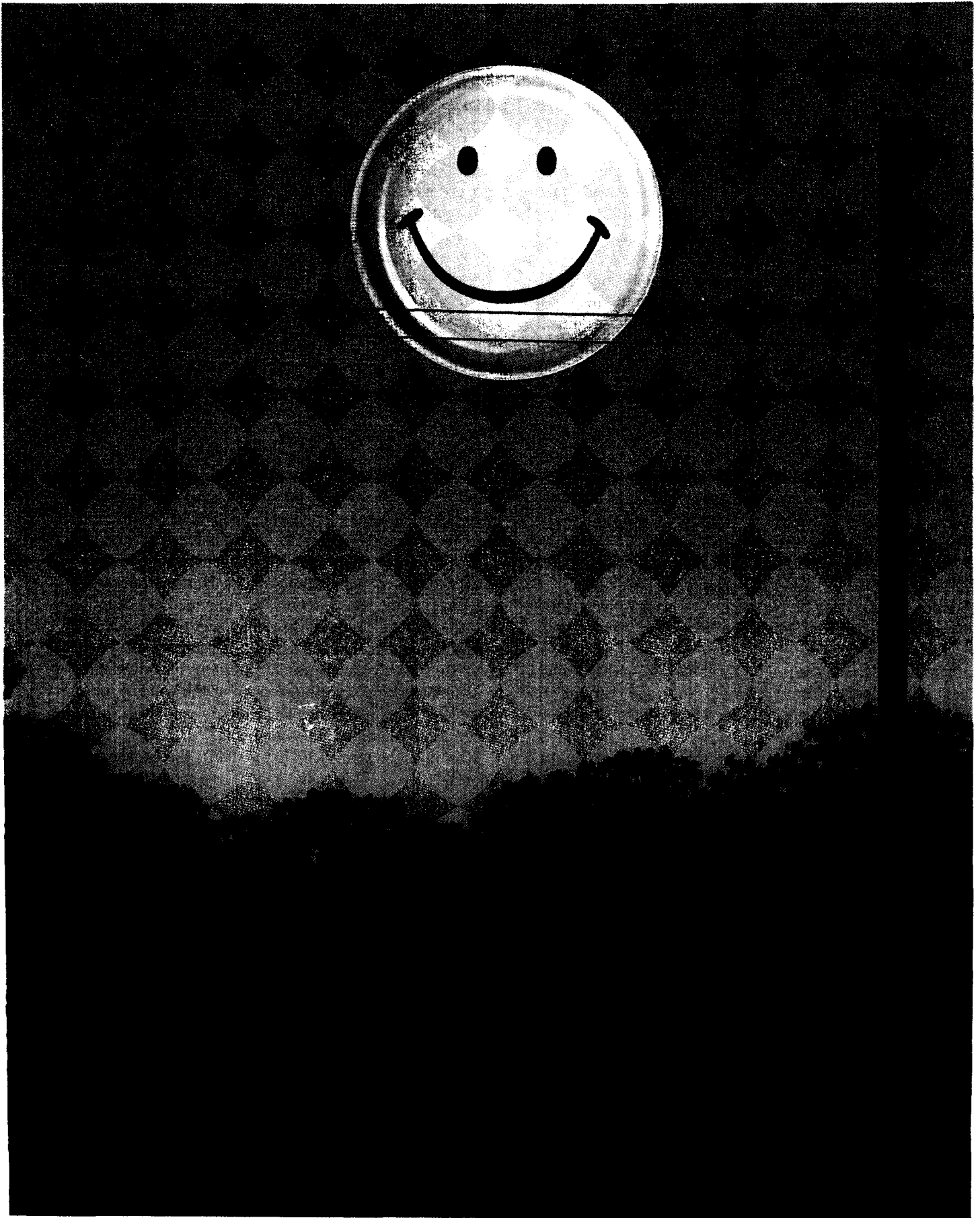
"You might not know Thurmond Watts, but he's got him a store down the road. That's Nameless, at his store. Still there, all right, but I might not vouch you that tomorrow."

Nameless, Tennessee, was a town of maybe ninety people if you pushed it, a dozen houses along the road, a couple of barns, same number of churches, a general-merchandise store selling Fire Chief gasoline, and a community center with a lighted volleyball court. Behind the center was an open-roofed, rusting metal privy with PAINT ME on the door; in the hollow of a nearby oak lay a full pint of Jack Daniel's. From the houses, the odor of coal smoke.

Next to a red tobacco barn stood the general-merchandise with a poster of Senator Albert Gore, Jr., smiling from the window. I knocked. The door opened a few inches. A tall, thin man said, "Closed up. For good," and started to shut the door.

"Don't want to buy anything. Just a question for Mr. Thurmond Watts."





The man peered through the slight opening. He looked me over. "What question would that be?"

"If this is Nameless, Tennessee, could he tell me how it got that name?"

The man turned back into the store and called out, "Miss Ginny! Somebody here wants to know how Nameless come to be Nameless."

Miss Ginny edged to the door and looked me and my truck over. Clearly, she didn't approve. She said, "You know as well as I do, Thurmond. Don't keep him on the stoop in the damp to tell him." Miss Ginny, I found out, was Mrs. Virginia Watts, Thurmond's wife.

I stepped in and they both began telling the story, adding a detail here, correcting a fact there, both smiling at the foolishness of it all. It seems the hilltop settlement went for years without a name. Then one day the Post Office Department told the people that if they wanted mail up on the mountain, they would have to give the place a name you could properly address a letter to. The community met; there was only a handful, but they commenced debating. Some wanted patriotic names, some names from nature; one man recommended, in all seriousness, his own name. They couldn't agree, and they ran out of names to argue about. Finally, a fellow tired of the talk; he didn't like the mail he received anyway. "Forget the darn post office," he said. "This here's a nameless place if I ever seen one, so leave it be." And that's just what they did.

Watts pointed out the window. "We used to have signs on the road, but the Halloween boys keep tearin' them down."

"You think Nameless is a funny name," Miss Ginny said. "I see it plain in your eyes. Well, you take yourself up north a piece to Difficult or Defeated or Shake Rag. Now them are silly names."

The old store, lighted only by three fifty-watt bulbs, smelled of coal oil and baking bread. In the middle of the rectangular room, where the oak floor sagged a little, stood an iron stove. To the right was a wooden table with an unfinished game of checkers, and a stool made from an apple-tree stump. On shelves around the walls sat earthen jugs with corncob stoppers, a few canned goods, and some of the 2,000 old clocks and clockworks Thurmond Watts owned. Only one was ticking. I asked how long he'd been in the store.

"Thirty-five years, but we closed the first day of the year. We're hopin' to sell it to a churchly couple. Upright people. No athians."

"Did you build this store?"

"I built this one, but it's the third general store on the ground. I fear it'll be the last. I take no pleasure in that. Once you could come in here for a gallon of paint, a pickle, a pair of shoes, and a can of corn."

"Or horehound candy," Miss Ginny said. "Or corsets and salves. We had cough syrups and all that for the body. In season, we'd buy and sell blackberries and walnuts and chestnuts, before the blight got them. And outside, Thur-

mond milled corn and sharpened plows. Even shoed a horse sometimes."

"We could fix up a horse or a man or a baby," Watts said.

"Thurmond, tell him we had a doctor on the ridge in them days."

"We had a doctor on the ridge in them days. As good as any doctor a-living. He'd cut a crooked toenail or deliver a woman. Dead these last years."

"I got some bad ham meat one day," Miss Ginny said, "and took to vomitin'. All day, all night. Hangin' on the drop edge of yonder. I said to Thurmond, 'Thurmond, unless you want shut of me, call the doctor.'"

"I studied on it," Watts said.

"You never did. You got him right now. He come over and put three drops of iodeen in half a glass of well water. I drank it down and the vomitin' stopped with the last swallow. Would you think iodeen could do that?"

"He put Miss Ginny on one teaspoon of spirits of ammonia in well water for her nerves. Ain't nothin' works better for her to this day."

"Calms me like the hand of the Lord."

Hilda, the Wattses' daughter, came out of the back room. "I remember him," she said. "I was just a baby. Y'all were talkin' to him, and he lifted me up on the counter and gave me a stick of Juicy Fruit and a piece of cheese."

"Knew the old medicines," Watts said. "Only drugstore he needed was a good kitchen cabinet. None of them antee-beotics that hit you worsen your ailment. Forgotten lore now, the old medicines, because they ain't profit in iodeen."

Miss Ginny started back to the side room where she and her sister Marilyn were taking apart a duck-down mattress to make bolsters. She stopped at the window for another look at Ghost Dancing. "How do you sleep in that thing? Ain't you all cramped and cold?"

"How does the clam sleep in his shell?" Watts said in my defense.

"Thurmond, get the boy a piece of buttermilk pie afore he goes on."

"Hilda, get him some buttermilk pie." He looked at me. "You like good music?" I said I did. He cranked up an old Edison phonograph, the kind with the big morning-glory blossom for a speaker, and put on a wax cylinder. "This will be 'My Mother's Prayer,'" he said.

While I ate buttermilk pie, Watts served as disc jockey of Nameless, Tennessee. "Here's 'Mountain Rose.'" It was one of those moments you know at the time will stay with you to the grave—the sweet pie, the gaunt man playing the old music, the coals in the stove glowing orange, the scent of kerosene and hot bread. "Here's 'Evening Rhapsody.'" The music was so heavily romantic we both laughed. I thought: It is for this I have come.

Feathered over and giggling, Miss Ginny stepped from the side room. She knew she was a sight. "Thurmond, give him some lunch. Still looks hungry."

Hilda pulled food off the wood stove in the back room: home-butchered and -canned whole-hog sausage, home-

canned June apples, turnip greens, cole slaw, potatoes, stuffing, hot cornbread. All delicious.

Watts and Hilda sat and talked while I ate.

"Wish you would join me."

"We've ate," Watts said. "Cain't beat a wood stove for flavorful cookin'."

He told me he was raised in a 150-year-old cabin, still standing in one of the hollows. "How many's left," he said, "that grew up in a log cabin? I ain't the last, surely, but I must be climbin' on the list."

Hilda cleared the table.

"You Watts ladies know how to cook."

"She's in nursin' school at Tennessee Tech. I went over for one of them football games last year there at Coevul." To say "Cookeville," you let the word collapse in upon itself so that it comes out "Coevul."

"Do you like football?" I asked.

"Don't know. I was so high up in that stadium, I never opened my eyes."

Watts went to the back and returned with a fat spiral notebook, which he set on the table. His expression had changed. "Miss Ginny's deathbook. She's wrote out twenty years' worth of them. Ever day she listens to the hospital report on the radio and puts the names in. Folks come by to check a date. Or they just turn through the books. Read them like a scrapbook."

Hilda said, "Like Saint Peter at the gates inscribin' the names."

Watts took my arm. "Come along." He led me to the fruit cellar under the store. As we went down, he said, "Always take a newborn baby upstairs afore you take him downstairs, otherwise you'll incline him downwards."

The old cellar was dry and full of cobwebs and jar after jar of home-canned food: sausage, pumpkin, sweet pickles, tomatoes, corn relish, blackberries, peppers, squash, jellies. Watts held a hand out toward the dusty bottles. "Our tomorrows."

When it was time for me to go, Watts said, "If you find anyone along your way wants a good store, on the road to Cordell Hull Lake, tell them about us."

I said I would. Miss Ginny and Hilda came out to say good-bye. It was cold and drizzling again. "Weather to give a man the weary dismals," Watts grumbled. "Where you headed from here?"

"I don't know."

"Cain't get lost, then."

ONE NIGHT, I STOPPED IN A CLEARING NEAR THE dam in Franklinville, North Carolina. Ten-thirty. I hadn't eaten, and now I was too tired to do anything but crawl into my sleeping bag.

At the moment of sleep, I heard something, something moving in the near woods, then into the clearing, toward the truck. A slow stepping. I couldn't remember whether I'd locked all the doors. It wasn't the steps that bothered

me, it was the slowness of them, the deliberate coming. It came on. Then it started to lurk.

I lay perfectly still, wondering whether I'd set the emergency brake and hoping Ford Motor Company hadn't skimped on a millimeter of steel wall. I had the sense that something was crouching outside, near my head. A soft brushing along the truck—a hand, a body—then an impacted silence. It moved again, and I tried to tell how many legs were stepping away.

There was a rational explanation for whatever it was, but I didn't have the nerve to find it. There are two kinds of adventurers: those who go truly hoping to find adventure, and those who go secretly hoping they won't. Midnight. I forced myself out of the ball I'd curled into, afraid as I did that my toes would touch something that didn't belong inside.

At three o'clock I sat bolt upright. I had no idea where I was, but I had just heard a yelp, and the walls of the Ghost pulsed blood red. I looked out the back window into a pair of ruby, oscillating eyes. Someone yelled. I clambered out barefoot, wearing only skivvies, and hobbled gingerly to the squad car. "What's wrong?"

In a Carolina cadence, the deputy said, "Ain't no sleepin' up here."

"That's what I'm finding out."

A fleck of yellow paint from a pencil stub stuck to his lip and bobbed up and down as he talked. "We close the dam area at sundown."

"I'll be gone in the morning." He stared at me. "I guess I could get dressed and leave now." He said nothing. "Just drove in from Missouri, though, and this bad leg I got in the U.S. Navy starts acting up if I don't rest it. Hurt it fighting communism."

"What's your name?"

I started to say "Standing Bull." Some Indians believe that to give your name is to put yourself in a stranger's power. But he might already have run a license check, so I told the truth. He pronounced the first name "Wim."

"Wim, I've logged your machine in. Maybe you're innocent, but just bein' near the dam makes you suspect if anything happens tonight."

"Happens? What do you mean, happens?"

"Been trouble around the dam. Things rollin' into the reservoir, gas drums knocked over. Always happens after dark."

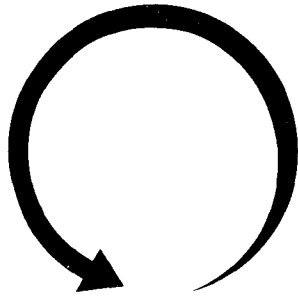
"I heard something about midnight—don't know what."

He looked a moment as if to assess. "Guarantee one thing, Wim. *This* boy wouldn't sleep up here 'mongst the whangdoodles withouten his peace of mind."

"Peace of mind?"

"Peace of mind." He tapped a thumb on the butt of his pistol. "Go ahead on and stay tonight. I'd sure secure those doors, though."

Before I fell asleep again, I remembered the red men who walked backward and brushed out their tracks so no dead soul could follow.



N EAR DARLINGTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, LITTLE dusty clouds went puffing over powdery tobacco fields in the hot wind, the pine needles looked dry and bleached, and the buds in the deciduous trees afforded no shade. A horse stood up to its belly in a pond of rust-colored water. For me, there was nothing to do but go on into the sun. I'd forgotten to refill the water jugs and had only a few swallows of warm, stale water left. I hoped for a soda fountain or a root-beer stand, but the road was dry fields and sun glare, and it went on and on.

Then, like a mirage, a sign: ARTESIAN WELL. I turned around. In a cool grove of loblolly, from an upright, L-shaped pipe the diameter of a saucer, flowed a silvery bash of water among ferns and moss. It gushed into my jugs, filling them instantly, almost knocking one from my grip. I drank off most of the first, gulping, spilling, drinking the coldness for so long I came up gasping. I put my head under the cataract, and the force bent me over. I shook the water off.

Someone was laughing. Behind me, a black man with white balls of hair at his temples said, "Had a tickhound used to do that." From the back seat of his Ford Galaxie, he and his wife unloaded forty-six empty plastic milk containers. He filled each gallon, capped it, and set it on the seat; then he opened the trunk and took out six five-gallon lard buckets and filled those. He finished in ten minutes.

"Do you use the water in gardening?"

"We uses it in us." They lived three miles away, had no running water, and came to the well Saturday mornings for seventy-six gallons of "sweet water."

"What makes it sweet?" I said.

"Nothin' in that water but water. Be comin' up from four hundred feet, gettin' cleaned all the way down and all the way back up. Natural wells used to be all over here, but them new, drilled wells dried up the others. But this one, he be too deep." The man closed the trunk and helped his wife into the car. "Gov'ment man come round and say he'd drill a well by the house. I tole him all we'd do with it was flush a water toilet, and we got no water toilet. I says, 'How that water gon get up to me?' He say with a 'lectric pump. I says, 'We drinks water what come up of his own mind.' "

When I went back for more, the water pressure shifted, answering some change in the aquifer deep below. I wondered how old the water was, how long it had taken to get

down and back up. I've never drunk glacier water from snows that fell a thousand years ago, but I couldn't imagine it being any better than the South Carolina water what come up of his own mind.

Out of the pines it was fifteen degrees hotter. A car passed, the driver slumped under the steering wheel, his shoeless and sockless left foot stuck out the window. Southern comfort.

Four words describe the history of the past three centuries here: indigo, rice, cotton, tobacco. One crop yielded to another as economics, society, science, and the land changed. In the past generation alone, erosion control, crop rotation, fertilizer, and pesticide have changed the face of the South, and the people's lives show it. Along the highway stood remnants of a Reconstruction South: sharecroppers' cabins. Many, like the ones in North Carolina, had been deserted for a subdivision-green prefab next door, but not all. On one slanting porch a woman worked at her wringer washer, and on another a man sat at the ready with a flyswatter. The Old South disappears. Yet the cabins, once an emblem of a land and a way of life, are something you can't see in Provo or Fort Wayne. Only on humanitarian grounds can a traveler approve the nationally standardized boxes replacing them.

I crossed the Wateree River, which meets up with the Congaree to the south and forms the Santee. South Carolinians like their rivers with paired Indian vowels: the two Pee Dees (Great and Little), the Combahee, Keowee, Tugaloo, Ashepoo. In Kershaw County, the land began rising once more as the road went into the eastern foothills of the Appalachians. I'd come again to the Piedmont Plateau. The people call it "the up country" and the coastal plain "the low country." Oak and pine covered the slopes, except where sections had been logged out or a pasture opened.

The heat held until sundown in Newberry. There, wearied from the eighty-five degrees, the glare, the racket of wind, I stopped. Newberry was a town of last-century buildings, old trees, columned houses with cast-iron fences, and gardens behind low brick walls. A lacy town. Old people moved along old sidewalks or pulled at greenery in old flower beds; they sat on old porches and shook the evening paper into obedience, or they rocked steady as old pendulums and looked into the old street as if reading something there. Living out the end of an era.

I N THE LAND OF "CO-COLA," IT WAS HOT AND DRY. THE artesian water was finished. Along Route 72, I tried not to look for a spring; I knew I wouldn't find one, but I kept looking. The Savannah River, dammed to an unnatural wideness, lay below, wet and cool. I'd come into Georgia. The sun seemed to press on the roadway, and inside the truck hot light bounced off chrome, flickering like a torch.

Sunset arrived west of Ogleby, and the air cooled. I hadn't eaten since morning. A road sign:

SWAMP GUINEA'S FISH LODGE
ALL YOU CAN EAT!

An arrow pointed down a county road. I would gorge myself. A record would be set. They'd ask me to leave. An embarrassment to all.

The road through the orange earth of north Georgia passed an old, three-story house with a thin black child hanging out of every window, like an illustration for "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," and on into hills and finally to Swamp Guinea's, a conglomerate of plywood and two-by-fours laid over with the smell of damp pine woods.

Inside, wherever an oddity or a natural phenomenon could hang, one hung: stuffed rump of a deer, snowshoe, flintlock, hornet's nest. The place looked as if a Boy Scout troop had decorated it. Thirty or so people, black and white, sat around tables that almost foundered under piled platters of food. I took a seat by the reproduction of a seventeenth-century woodcut depicting some Rabelaisian banquet at the groaning board.

The diners were mostly Oglethorpe County red-dirt farmers. In Georgia tones they talked about their husbandry in terms of rain and nitrogen and hope. An immense woman with a glossy picture of a hooked bass leaping on the front of her shirt said, "I'm gonna be sick from how much I've ate."

I was watching everyone else and didn't see the waitress standing quietly by. Her voice was deep and soft, like water moving in a cavern. I ordered the \$4.50 special. In a few minutes she wheeled up a cart and began off-loading dinner: ham and eggs, fried catfish, fried perch fingerlings, fried shrimp, chunks of barbecued beef, fried chicken, french fries, hush puppies, a broad bowl of coleslaw, another of lemon, a quart of iced tea, and an entire loaf of factory-wrapped white bread. The table was covered.

"Call me if y'all want any more." She wasn't joking.

I quenched the thirst and then—slowly—went to the eating. I had to stand to reach plates across the table, but I intended to do the supper in. It was all southern-fried and good, except for the southern-style sweetened iced tea, and I even took care of a quart of that. As I ate, making up for meals lost, the Old Woman's house flashed before me, lightning in darkness. I had no moral right to eat so much. But I did.

The loaf of bread lay unopened when I finally abandoned the meal. At the register, I paid a man who looked as if he'd been chipped out of Georgia chert. The Swamp Guinea. I asked about the name. He spoke of himself in the third person, like the Wizard of Oz. "The Swamp Guinea only tells regulars."

"I'd be one, Mr. Guinea, if I didn't live in Missouri."

"Y'all from the North? Here, I got somethin' for you." He went to the office and returned with a 45-rpm record. "It's my daughter singin'. A little promotion we did. Take it along." Later, I heard a throaty North Georgia voice let go a down-home, lyric rendering of Swamp Guinea's menu:

"That's all you can eat
For a dollar fifty,
Hey! The barbecue's nifty!"

And so on through the fried chicken and potatoes.

As I left, the Swamp Guinea, a former antique dealer whose name was Rudell Burroughs, said, "The nickname don't mean anything. Just made it up. Tried to figure a good one so we can franchise someday."

The frogs, high and low, shrilled and bellowed from the trees and ponds. It was cool going into Athens, a city suffering from a nasty case of the sprawls. On the University of Georgia campus, I tried to walk down Swamp Guinea's supper; everywhere couples were entwined like moonflower vines, each waiting for the blossom that opens only once.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. STREET, IN SELMA, Alabama, used to be Sylvan Street. Some whites still call it Sylvan. It's the main route through the so-called "project"—a typical federally sponsored housing district—and the street the Southern Christian Leadership Conference assembled the marchers on, using the block under the high steeple of Brown's Chapel as the starting point. The first marchers walked down Sylvan (as it was then), up Water Avenue, turned left, and started across Pettus Bridge. About half a mile. At the other end of the bridge, deputies and troopers, shouting to the people that they had no permit to march, forced them back to Water Avenue. But for once, chants and signs and feet were better weapons than anything the state could show. Whitman, the egalitarian, said it a century before:

And I will make a song for the ears of the President, full
of weapons with menacing points,
And behind the weapons countless dissatisfied faces . . .

When King assembled the marchers again, two weeks later, he had not only a permit but the protection—albeit spotty—of federal troops called out by President Johnson, the man with the big ears. People gathered at Brown's Chapel and walked fifty miles to Montgomery. The two marches roused Washington as none of the other SCLC confrontations had, and a few months later the Congress passed the Federal Voting Rights Act.

It was dark and moonless when I started looking for Brown's Chapel. I planned just to drive by, but I stopped near a big brick church that fit the description to ask a black man if it was the chapel. "That's it," he said. "What difference does it make?"

Without knowing it, he had asked me the question I'd come to Selma to answer. "Isn't this where King started the march?"

"What they say. So who cares?"

I stood on the step of the van. "I'm trying to find out if things have changed since the march."

"Tell you in three words. Ain't nothin' changed."

"Let me ask another question. Could you get a drink in Mickey's tonight?"

"Go ask me if I *want* in there, because I'll tell you they don't gotta keep this man out because he don't want in."

"I hear you, but *could* you?"

"Minute I do it's membership time."

"I just went in and nobody said anything about membership."

"Your membership's got a way of standin' out—just like mine."

Several teenagers gathered around. I was the wrong color on the wrong street, but no one said anything. The man talking to me was James Walker, born and raised in the Selma project and just discharged from four years in the Air Force. "Been almost ten years to the day since King got shot," he said, "and the movement's been dead that long. Things slippin'. Black man's losin' ground again. My momma's afraid to talk to a white, and my grand-momma don't care. She just worries about the kids."

"Didn't the march do anything you can see?"

"Say what? Last week I went to get my driver's license. Twelve-thirty. Lunch time. Sign on the door says they open again at one. I wanted to wait inside, so I pulled on the door. Trooper comes out and says, 'What's wrong, fool? Cain't read? Get off that door 'less you want me next time comin' out shootin'.' There's your change."

"Where?"

"Ten years ago he woulda come out shootin' the first time."

"What happened?"

"Nothin', dude. This man's not stupid. I know when to shut up and I know when to talk. This man knows when he's got a chance."

A police car cruised by. A teenager said, "That's twice." A Buick pulled up and Walker got in. He said, "You're makin' people nervous comin' in down here. You ain't the right color, you know. Better watch your ass tonight." The car jumped forward, then backed up. "If you ain't jivin' about Brown's Chapel, come round the basketball court behind the church in the mornin'."

At ten the next morning, I was back on King Street, a block south of where it crosses Jeff Davis Avenue. On the court, Walker was alone, juking and shooting. "Hey! You showed up." For the first time I saw him smile. "Just workin' on my game till school starts. Didn't get out of the Air Force in time to make spring term."

"What school?"

"Alabama Lutheran, here in Selma. All black, which is what I want. I'm tired of hasslin' with whites. Got enough in the Force."

"You don't want to go North or West?"

"And be a minority? That ain't my land."

"What'll you do here?"

"Study guidance counselin'. I'm stayin' where I can do some good. Fifty-five percent of Selma's black—we got

potential. First, though, brothers gotta see what's on the other side of Pettus Bridge, see where to go from here."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean figurin' a new course. King said turn the other cheek. Malcolm X said fight fire with fire. I don't want that. But we gotta show the brothers they can do more than just hang cool like meat in a locker."

"Maybe things haven't changed because of apathy in the project."

"I ain't lettin' nobody off that easy. A man shouldn't gotta care so much about gettin' a fair game. *You* gotta worry every day about a fair game?"

"Not usually."

"So why should this man? Sure, the brothers could do more, and they would if they didn't spend so much time gettin' and keepin' a job. Wearies a man out. It never quits. If a brother gets hired and then gets active—there goes the job he worked his ass off to get."

"Can't legally let a man go if he's not talking around on company time."

"They don't fire him—ain't that clean. They hassle him. Get him thinkin' new ideas ain't worth it. Stay on him till he quits. A mover gets to stay only if boss-man's under quota. Otherwise, carry your hat in your hand."

A friend of Walker's came up. "Saw you down here last night," he said. "We doan get many calls from your people." His name was Charles Davis. He worked the middle shift at a battery factory. "I'll tell you about jobs. If I quit mine and go over to the job office, they'll hand me a shovel or send me to Florida to pick oranges. I can do more than dig a hole or cut a weed."

"Lotta people in the project feel like they cain't be nobody," Walker said. "Me? I feel I can be President of the United States."

"Sheeeit, man!" Davis said. "Force musta did in your brain-housing group."

"I know things ain't changed, but things gonna change."

"Young, and mad, and believe so much," Davis said.

"I'm twenty-four and he's thirty-one. So I am from nowhere? I'm talkin' future. Anyway, this man wants to know about the march."

"I think I was fifteen," Davis said. "Made both marches. People be sayin' we wasted our time, but things are better. Least a little bit."

"Ain't nothin' changed didn't have to change," Walker said.

"Some of those things be important, though. But lotta times it's like always. Take yesterday. I put a quarter in a soda pop machine at the gas station. Money keeps comin' down. Two honkies sit watchin'. I ask if the machine was broke, and one honker says it takes thirty cents now. Machine says twenty-five on it. Then he says, 'Wondered how long 'fore you figured it out.' He couldn't tell me they changed it. I said, 'Don't take long to figure you,' and walked off. Other honker says, 'Want me to whup the nig-

ger?" Five years ago I'da fought him. Now I try to ignore it. But hey, I used to follow Malcolm X."

Walker said, "Alabama state motto is 'Defendin' Our Rights.' And that's all we're doin'. All the time."

NEAR VILLE PLATTE, LOUISIANA, I SWITCHED ON the radio and turned the dial. Somewhere between a shill for a drive-up savings-and-loan and one for salvation, I found a raucous music that was part bluegrass fiddle, part Texas guitar, part Highland concertina. Cajun voices sang an old, flattened French, part English, part undecipherable.

Looking for Cajun music, I stopped in Opelousas at the Plantation Lounge. Somebody sat on every barstool; but one man, seeing a stranger, jumped down, shook my hand, and insisted I take his seat. In the fast roll of Cajun English, he said it was the guest stool and by right belonged to me. The barmaid, a woman with coiled eyes, brought a Jax.

"Is there Cajun music here tonight?" I asked.

"Jukebox is our music tonight," she snapped.

A man called Walt, with black hair oiled and slicked back in the style of an older time, squeezed in beside me. "If you're lookin' for French music, you need to get yourself to laugh yet."

"What's that mean?"

"Means haul your butt to laugh yet. Biggest Coonass city in the world."

"Lafayette?" I made it three syllables.

"You got it, Junior, but we don't say Lah-fay-et."

"Where should I go in Laughyet?"

He drew a map so detailed I could almost see chuckholes in the streets. "Called Eric's. That's one place. In Laughyet they got whatever you want—music, hooch, girls, fights, everything."

If you've read Longfellow, you can't miss Cajunland once you get to the heart of it: Evangeline Downs (horses), Evangeline Speedway (autos), Evangeline Thruway (trucks), Evangeline Drive-in, and, someone had just said, the Sweet Evangeline Whorehouse.

I found my way among the Evangelines into an industrial area of Lafayette, a supply depot for bayou and offshore drilling operations. Along the streets were oil-rig outfitters where everything was sections of steel: pipes, ladders, derricks, piles, cables, buoys, tanks. Crude oil opened Acadian Louisiana as nothing in the past three centuries had; it seemed as if little could be left unfound in Cajun hamlets that once were literally backwaters.

Eric's, on the edge of the outfitters' district, was a windowless, concrete-block box with a steel door, broken neon, and a parking lot full of pickups, Cadillacs, and El Caminos ("cowboy Cadillacs"). But no French music.

I drank a Dixie and ate bar peanuts and asked the bartender where I could hear "chanky-chank," as Cajuns call

their music. She, too, drew a map, but her knowledge gave out before she got to the destination. "It's called Tee's. It's down one of these roads, but they all look alike to me out there."

"Out there?"

"It's in the country. Follow my map and you'll be within a couple miles."

When I left, she said good luck. The traveler should stand warned when he gets wished luck. I followed her map until the lights of Lafayette were just a glowing sky and the land was black. I wound about, crossing three identical bridges or crossing one bridge three times. I gave up and tried to find my way back to town and couldn't do that either.

Then a red glow like a campfire. A beer sign. Hearty music rolled out the open door of a small tavern, and a scent of simmering hot peppers steamed from the stovepipe chimney. I'd found Tee's. Inside, under dim halos of yellow bug lights, an accordion—the heart of a Cajun band—a fiddle, a guitar, and a ting-a-ling (triangle) cranked out chanky-chank. The accordionist introduced the numbers as songs of *amour* or *joie* and the crowd cheered; but when he announced "*une chanson de mariage*," they booed him. Many times he cried out the Cajun motto: "*Laissez les bons temps rouler!*"

While the good times rolled, I sat at the bar next to a man dying to talk. His name was Joe Seipel and his speech Great Lakes. I asked, "You from Wisconsin?"

"Minnesota. But I been here seven years working for PHI."

"What's PHI?"

He put down his bottle and gave me an exaggerated, wide-eyed, open-mouthed look to indicate my shocking ignorance. "You gotta be kidding!"

"About what?"

"Petroleum Helicopters Incorporated!" He shook his head. "Jees!"

"Oh, that's right. What kind of helicoptering do you do?" I tried to talk between tunes, but he talked through them all.

"I don't fly. I'm a mechanic. But Stoney here flies out to the offshore rigs. Delivers supplies, crews. You know."

The pilot, in his fifties, wore cowboy boots and a jaunty avocado jumpsuit. He was applying a practiced Bridges-at-Toko-Ri machismo to a hugely mammaried woman who had painted on a pair of arched red lips.

Seipel said, "I was just like you when I came here—dumb as hell. But I've read about Louisiana. Learned about Coonasses from that yellow book."

"What yellow book is that?"

"That one comes out every month."

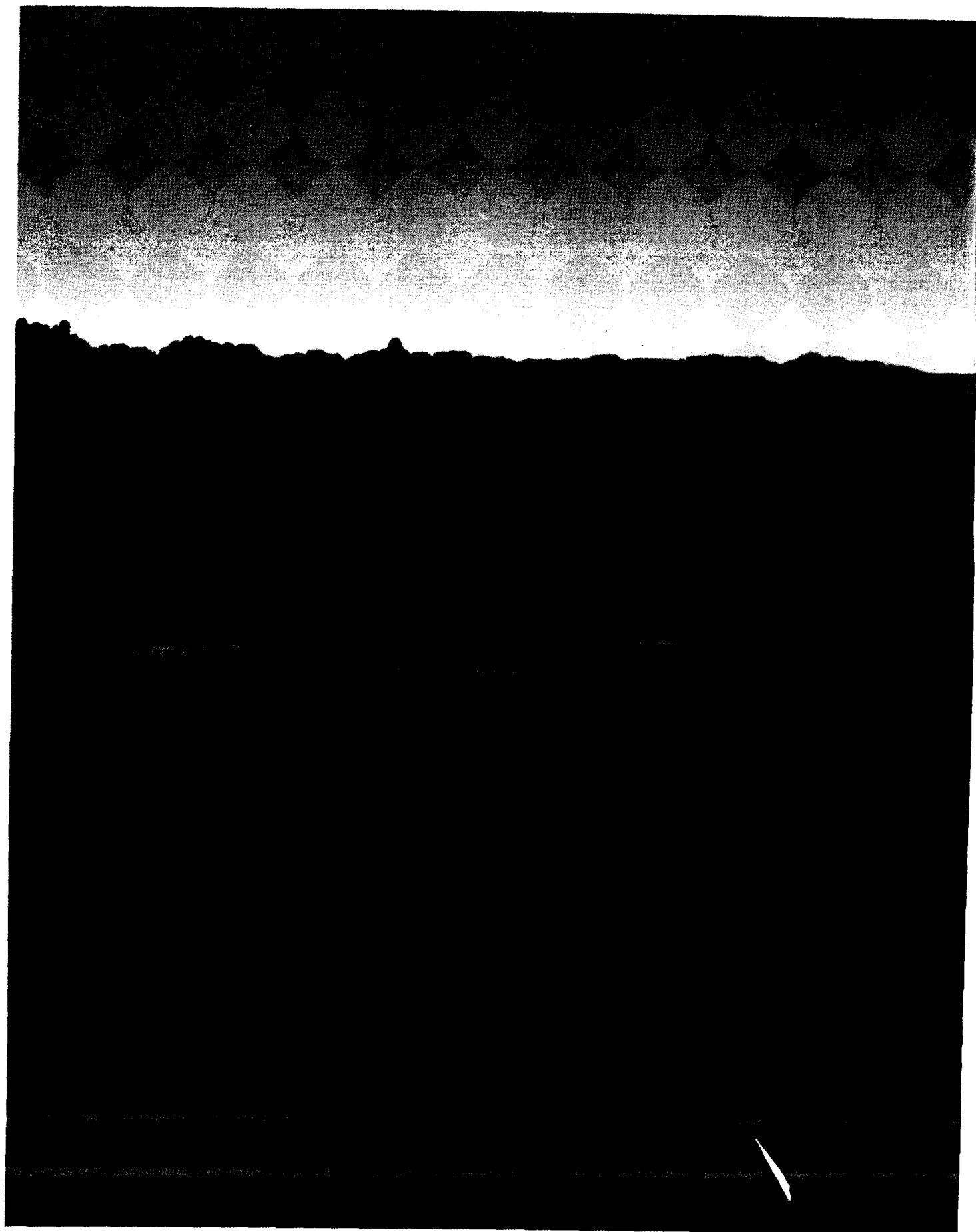
"National Geographic?"

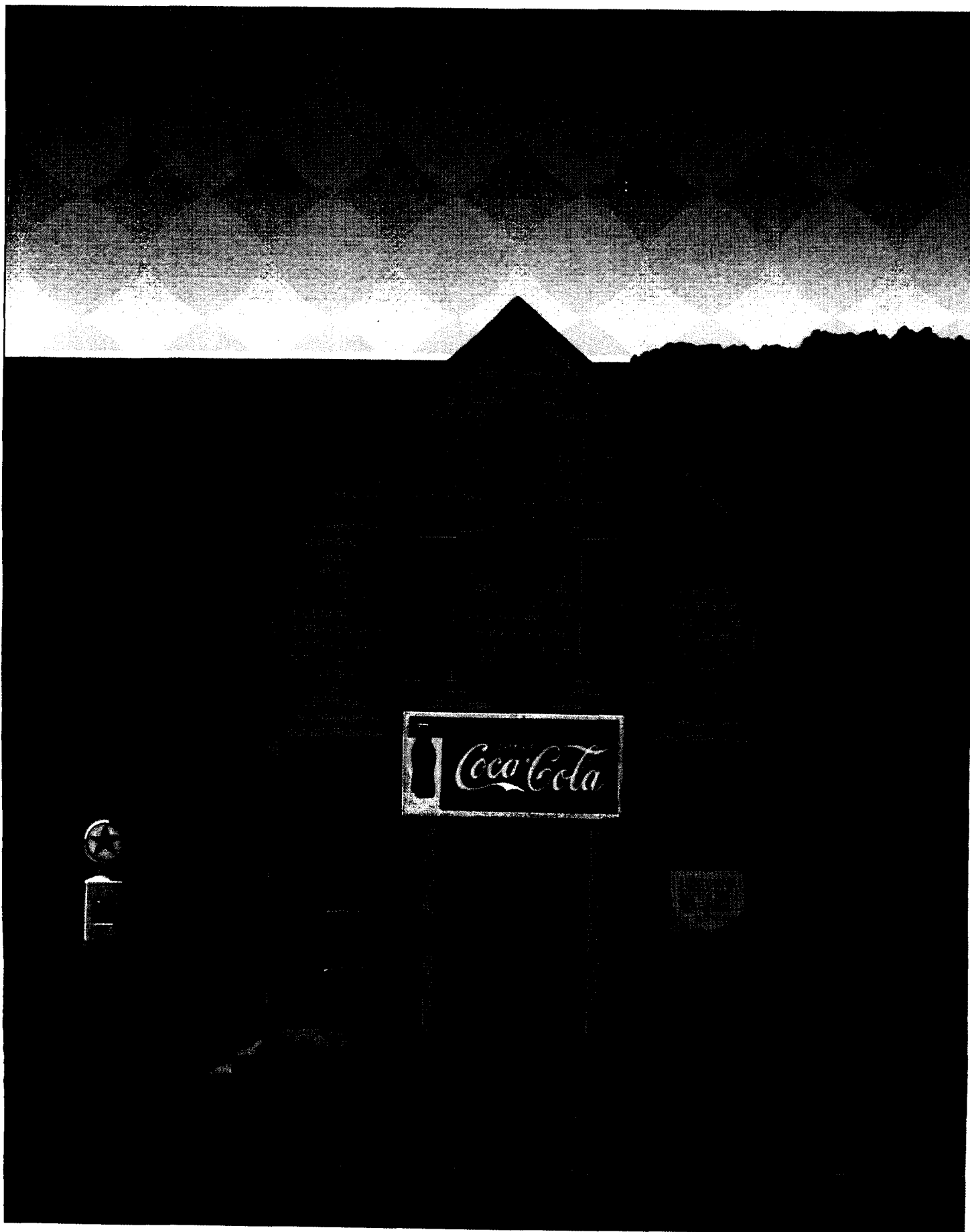
"That's it. They had a story on Coonasses."

"Did they explain the name 'Coonass'?"

"I think they missed that."

A small, slue-footed Gallic man wearing a silky shirt





with a pelican on it dragged an upturned metal washtub next to the band and climbed on. I think he'd taken out his dentures. A mop handle with twine tied to it projected from the tub, and he thrust the stick about in rhythm with the music, plucking out a sound of a double bass.

"That's DeePaul on the gut bucket," Seipel said. "He's not with the band."

After a couple of numbers on the tub, the small man hopped down and waltzed around the floor, quite alone, snapping his wrists, making sharp, rapid clacks with four things that looked like big ivory dominoes.

"Those are the bones," Seipel said. "Sort of Cajun castanets."

When the band folded for the night, the little fellow sa-shayed to the lighted jukebox, drawn to it like a moth, and clacked the bones in fine syncopation, his red tongue flicking out the better to help him syncopate, his cropped orb of a head glowing darkly. Seipel hollered him over.

He showed how to hold the bones, one on each side of the middle fingers, then flung out his wrist as if throwing off water and let loose a report like the crack of a bullwhip. "Try dem in you hands."

The bones were smooth, like old jade. I laboriously inserted the four-inch counters between my fingers and snapped my wrist. *Cluk-cluk*. "Lousy," Seipel said. I tried again. *Cluk-cluk*. Wet sponges had more resonance. Seipel shook his head, so I handed them to him. He got them mounted, lashed out an arm, and a bone sailed across the room.

"You boys don't got it," DeePaul said, his words looping in the old Cajun way. DeePaul's name was Paul Duhon. He had cut the clappers from a certain leg bone in a steer and carved them down to proper shape and a precise thickness. "You got to have da right bone, or da sound she muffle. And da steer got to be big for da good ringin' bones."

I tried again. *Cluk-cluk*. "I work at dis forty years," Duhon said, "and just now do I start gettin' it right. Look at me, gettin' ole and just now gettin' good. Dat's why only ole, ole men play da good bones."

"Where'd you learn to make them?"

"Ole color man, he work on da rayroad. He got nuttin' but he love music, so he play da bones. He play dem in da ole minstrel shows. He da one dey call 'Mister Bones,' and it Mister Bones hisself he show me carvin'. Now people say, 'Come play us da bones in Shrevepote.' But da bones just for fun."

"I can play the musical saw," Seipel said, and called to the barmaid, "Got a saw here?" She pushed him a salt shaker. "What's this?"

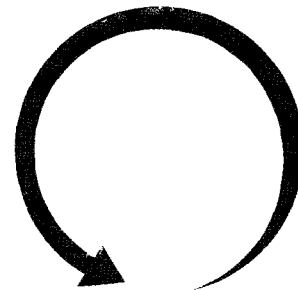
"That's the salt you're yellin' for." Seipel and I laughed, holding on to the bar. Duhon went home. Everybody went home. The barmaid watched us wearily. "Okay," she said, "come on back for some hot stuff."

"Is this where we find out why they call themselves 'Coonasses'?" I said, and we laughed again, holding on to each other.

"All right, boys. Settle down." She led us not to a bedroom but to a large concrete-floor kitchen with an old picnic table under a yellow fluorescent tube. We sat, and a young Cajun named Michael passed a long loaf of French bread. The woman put two bowls on the oilcloth and ladled up gumbo. Now, I've eaten my share of gumbo, but never had I tasted anything like that gumbo: the oysters were fresh and fat, the shrimp succulent, the spiced sausage meaty, okra sweet, rice soft, and the roux, the essence—the roux was right. We could almost stand our spoons on end in it.

The roots of Cajun cookery come from Brittany and bear no resemblance to Parisian cuisine and not much to the Creole cooking of New Orleans. Those are *hautes cuisines* of the city, and Cajun food belongs to the country, where things got mixed up over the generations. No one even knows the source of the word "gumbo." Some say it derives from an African word for okra, *chinggômbô*, while others believe it a corruption of a Choctaw word—*kombo*—for sassafras, the key seasoning.

The woman disappeared, so we ate gumbo and dipped bread and no one talked. A gray cat hopped on the bench between Seipel and me to watch each bite of both bowls we ate. Across the room, a fat, buffy mouse moved over the stove top and browsed for drippings from the big pot. The cat eyed it every so often but made no move away from our bowls. Seipel said, "I've enjoyed the hell out of tonight," and laid out a small shrimp for the cat. Nothing more got spoken. We all went at the gumbo—Minnesotan, Cajun, cat, mouse, Missourian.



DIME BOX, TEXAS, IS NOT THE FUNNIEST TOWN name in America. Traditionally, that honor belongs to Intercourse, Pennsylvania. I prefer Scratch Ankle, Alabama, Gnaw Bone, Indiana, or even Humptulips, Washington. Nevertheless, Dime Box—as a name—caught my ear, so that's where I was headed.

In the humid night, the inside windows had dripped like cavern walls. Along State 21, I opened up and let warm air blow out the damp. West of the Brazos, the land unfolded even farther to the blue sky. Now the horizon wasn't ten or fifteen miles away, it was thirty or forty. On telephone wires sat scissor-tailed flycatchers, their oddly long tails hanging under them like stilts. Roadside wild flowers—bluebonnets, purple wine-cups, evening primroses, and

more—were abundant as crops, and where wide reaches of bluebonnets (once called buffalo clover, wolf flower, and—by the Spanish—"the rabbit") covered the slopes, their scent filled the highway. To all the land there was an intense clarity, as if the little things gave off light.

Across the Yegua Creek a sign pointed south to Dime Box. Over broad hills, over the green expansion spreading under cedars and live oaks, on into a valley where I found Dime Box, essentially a three-street town. Vegetable gardens and flower beds lay to the side, behind, and in front of the houses. Perpendicular to the highway, two streets ran east and west: one of worn brick buildings facing the Southern Pacific tracks, the other a double row of false-front stores and wooden sidewalks. Disregarding a jarring new bank, Dime Box could have been an MGM backlot set for a western.

I walked to the post office for stamps. The postmistress explained the town name. A century ago the custom was to drop a letter and ten cents for postage in the pickup box. That was in Old Dime Box, up on the San Antonio road, now Texas 21. "What happened to Old Dime Box?"

"A couple houses there yet," she said, "but the railroad came through in 1913 three miles south, so they moved the town to the tracks—to here. Now the train's about gone. Some freights, but that's it."

"I see Czech names on the stores."

"We're between Giddings and Caldwell. Giddings is mostly German and Caldwell's mostly Czech. We're close to fifty-fifty. Whites that is. A third of Dime Box is black people."

"How do the different groups get along?"

"Pretty well. We had a to-do in the sixties over integration, but it was mostly between white groups arguing about who had the right to run the schools. Some parents bused kids away for a spell, but that was just anger."

"Busing in Dime Box?"

"City people don't think anything important happens in a place like Dime Box. And usually it doesn't, unless you call conflict important. Or love or babies or dying."

The big bass had a pair of horns, and beneath it, the barber of Dime Box dozed in his chair. He woke when I stepped in front of the long, open windows to look at the trophy on his wall. "Texas bull bass," he said. "More bull than bass." It was so craftily assembled I couldn't see how he'd done it. "I caught the fish and mounted it to the steer horns. Kids come in to stare. Spooks them. Don't know why nature never put horns on a fish."

"Or fins on a longhorn?" I needed a trim. "Just nip the ends."

"One of them no-ears cuts. Took an ear off a week back—didn't see it."

I trusted that was a joke. I hadn't paid \$1.50 for a haircut in a decade. The old clock in Claud Tyler's barbershop had stopped at two-ten, and in the center of the shop stood an iron wood stove, now assisted by a small gas one.

Above the sink were bottles of Lucky Tiger hair tonic. I'd forgotten about tonics.

"Where you hail from, bub?" he said.

"Same place your Lucky Tiger's made."

He stepped away from the chair to look me over closely. "Ever know a fellow named Wendell Thompson from up in Missouri? Called him 'Hop'?"

I said I didn't. Several other times he asked if I knew So-and-so from up my way, each time giving the moniker: Beep, Cherry, Pard, Tinbutt.

"Hop lived in the county a while. I and him was in the Fox and Wolf Hunters Association. Now that was a bunch of fellers. I had a history of the association. Plumb interesting. The mother-in-law burned it up."

He took from the wall a framed panoramic photograph of a group of men in hunting garb and laid it across my lap. The picture was a good three feet long, and there must have been a hundred men standing or kneeling in a field with a beagle here and about. "Can you find me?"

I tried four or five times. I think it disheartened him that I couldn't recognize a younger Tyler. "Have I changed that much?" He pointed himself out and then brought me a worn copy of a Texas hunting magazine with several photographs of men around campfires. I looked carefully and took a chance.

"Hell, that's Raymond Mueller. Called him 'Dipper.' This one's me."

"I see it now. How could I miss it? Got a bad eye."

"Hooley. That's before I started fading away. I had an aneurism removed, and I just ain't the man I was. I can abide that, but take you, you're a stranger, and all you see is a seventy-six-year-old man. I wasn't always like this. That's what hurts—people forget what you been." He stepped away from the chair again. "Listen to me. I used to cut hair and press suits all day, then go out and hunt half the night. Now I just talk a big stick. Only thing that don't run down is your mouth."

"What's that about pressing suits?"

"Come here." I followed him to a small back room, the striped chair cloth still around my neck, hair half cut. He pointed to an old steam press.

"Sold the dry-cleaning machine, but there's where I put a million creases in pants. Started in 1925. Feller would come in for a shave, haircut, and suit pressing. All for thirty-five cents. This was as good a shop as any in Texas. And I did a business. Listened to a million stories cutting those old squirrels' heads. Barber's the third most lied-to person, you know."

"Who's first?"

"Man's wife is first anywhere in the world. Priest is second."

We went back to the chair, and he took more snips. "Used to barber across the street. West of Sonny's. Oughta go see the rattlesnake skins in there." He motioned south, and for a moment I thought I would have to cross the street with a half-cut head to look at Sonny's rattlesnakes.

"Been in this shop since the forties. Built it myself. How many barbers left that built their own shops?"

"Saw some figures on it. I think it was three—not counting you."

Tyler smiled. "Come here." I followed him to the side window, where a big sycamore grew from under the edge of the wooden building. It had started to lift the floor. "Tree's old as the shop. Cut it down once a year for six years. Finally gave up. I'll be gone before it turns the place over. Filled in that west side with river sand when I built the shop. Musta took in a seed." We went back to the chair. "Gotten old watching that tree grow. It's so cussed fixed on making its way, I've thought about pulling the shop down to give it room. Kind of living memorial to shade-tree barbering. Ain't much need of a barbershop in Dime Box now. People get out to the bigger towns anymore."

"A lot of small towns are coming back."

"Could happen to us. They located a big pool of oil here—deep oil. Way down. Feller picked up some land for back taxes, turned around and discovered oil. Now people believe oil's gonna bring things back like they used to be. I say hoping's swell, but better be ready for it to go as fast as it comes. Who listens? People thought the railroad wouldn't ever play out neither—that's why they moved the town here. We used to say there'd always be the railroad. You could count on it because it don't depend on weather and weevils don't eat steel. Well, bub, how'd you like our depot?"

"I haven't seen it."

"Tore down, that's why. But Model Ts used to line up all along the road to the depot. Cars, trains, girls in big hats. Dime Box made noise then."

"Freights still come through, don't they?"

"Can't live off a toot and a whistle unless you can eat steam. Hell, it ain't even steam anymore. We get on now with ranching, farming, people stopping off on the way to the artificial lake."

"Artificial?" I imagined a giant plastic pond—the height of Disney World fool-the-eye stuff.

"Lake Somerville. One of those dam lakes." He whisked away the hair with a little white brush. "Before the cattle business got big in here, we used to grow cotton—even had a gin. All gone. When I was a whippersnapper, I used to look at the cotton fields and wonder which boll would end up in my shirt. Now shirts are this polyester made from oil. But I reckon when we go to pumping oil, Dime Box will be back in the shirt business, and they'll call that progress."

He started to dress me down with Lucky Tiger. "Leave it dry, if you would."

"You young fellers take all the fun out of barbering. I'da got run out of town thirty years ago for a haircut like that."

To me, it was the best haircut I ever got in Dime Box, Texas.

STRAIGHT AS A CHIEF'S COUNTENANCE, THE DEL Rio-San Angelo road lay ahead, curves so long and gradual as to be imperceptible except on the map. For nearly a hundred miles due west of Eldorado, not a single town. It was the Texas some people see as barren waste when they cross it, the part they later describe at the motel bar as "nothing." They say, "There's nothing out there."

Driving through the miles of nothing, I decided to test the hypothesis, and stopped somewhere in western Crockett County on the top of a broad mesa, just off Texas 29. At a distance, the land looked so rocky and dry, a religious man could believe that the First Hand never got around to the Creation in here. Still, somebody had decided to string barbed wire around it.

No plant grew higher than my head. For a while, I heard only miles of wind against the Ghost; but after the ringing in my ears stopped, I heard myself breathing, then a bird note, an answering call, another kind of birdsong, and another—mockingbird, mourning dove, an enigma. I heard the high zizz of flies the color of gray flannel and the deep buzz of a blue bumblebee. To say nothing is out here is incorrect; to say the desert is stingy with everything but space and light, stone and earth, is closer to the truth.

I drove on. The low sun turned the mesa rimrock to silhouettes, angular and weird and unearthly; had someone said the far side of Saturn looked just like this, I would have believed him. The road dropped to the Pecos River, now dammed to such docility that I couldn't imagine it formerly demarking the western edge of a rudimentary white civilization. Even the old wagonmen felt the unease of isolation when they crossed the Pecos, a small but once serious river that has had many names: Rio de las Vacas (River of Cows—perhaps a reference to bison); Rio Salado (Salty River); Rio Puerco (Dirty River).

West of the Pecos, a strangely truncated cone rose from the valley. In the oblique evening light, its silhouette looked like a Mayan temple, so perfect was its symmetry. I stopped again, started climbing, stirring a panic of lizards on the way up. From the top, the rubbled land below—veined with the highway and arroyos, topographical relief absorbed in the dusk—looked like a road map.

The desert, more than any other terrain, shows its age, shows time, because so little vegetation covers the ancient erosions of wind and storm. What appears is tawny grit once stone and stone crumbling to grit. Everywhere rock, earth's oldest thing. Even desert creatures come from a time older than the woodland animals, and they, in answer to the arduousness, have retained prehistoric coverings of chitin and lapped scale, and primitive defenses of spine and stinger, fang and poison, shell and claw.

The night, taking up the shadows and details, wiped the face of the desert into a simple, uncluttered blackness until there were only three things: land, wind, stars. I was there too, but my presence I felt more than saw; it was as if I had been reduced to mind, to an edge of consciousness.

Men, ascetics, in all eras have gone into deserts to lose themselves—Jesus, Saint Anthony, Saint Basil, and numberless medicine men—maybe because it happens almost as a matter of course here if you avail yourself. The Sioux once chanted, “All over the sky a sacred voice is calling.”

With dawn, the wind came strong from the north, blowing the dusty mesa tops into the irrigated valley, pushing my little coach from shoulder to centerline until my arms tired from holding a course against it. Far to the south, long purple stretches of the Glass Mountains slowed the rush of wind into the Chihuahua desert, but nothing was big enough to shut it down altogether. The radio warned that gusts would hit fifty miles an hour by afternoon.

The land rose steadily, then at Balmorhea the highland mesas became the eastern ridges of the Rocky Mountains. Interstate 10, the only way west, differed here from a two-lane simply by extra strips of concrete—there were few towns to bypass. And so, like the locomotive, I lapped the miles across the Apache Mountains and Devil Ridge and onward. Bugs popping the windshield left only clear fluid instead of the yellow and green pollen-laden goo of woodland insects; it was as if they extracted their colorless essence from the desert wind itself.

ARIZONA: SOMEWHERE OUT THERE WAS THE COLORADO River, perfectly hidden in the openness. The river wasn't more than a mile away, but I couldn't make out the slightest indication of it in the flat desert stretching level and unbroken for twenty or thirty miles west, although I was only fifty miles above where it enters the Grand Canyon. This side of the Colorado gorge was once an important Hopi trail south and, some say, the route Hopi guides took when they first led white men to the canyon. While the arid path followed the river below, water was an inaccessible 400 feet down. Typically, the Hopi solved the desert: women buried gourds of water at strategic points on the outward journey for use on the return.

The highway made an unexpected jog toward Navajo Bridge, a melding of silvery girders and rock cliffs. Suddenly, there it was, far below in the deep and scary canyon of sides so sheer they might have been cut with a stone saw, the naturally silted water turned an unnatural green (*colorado* means “reddish”) by the big settling basin a few miles upriver called Glen Canyon Dam. Navajo Bridge, built in 1929, when paved roads began opening the area, is the only crossing over the Colorado between Glen Canyon and Hoover Dam, several hundred river miles downstream.

West of the gorge lay verdant rangeland, much of it given to a buffalo herd maintained by the Arizona Game & Fish Commission; the great beasts lifted their heads to watch me pass, their dark, wet eyes catching the late sun. To the north rose the thousand-foot butt end of the Vermil-

ion Cliffs; the cliffs weren't truly vermilion, but contrasting with the green valley in the orange afternoon light they seemed so.

In 1776, a Spanish expedition, led by the missionaries Francisco Silvestre Vélez de Escalante and Francisco Atanasio Dominguez, returning from an unsuccessful search for a good northern route to the California missions, wandered dispiritedly along the Vermilion Cliffs as they tried to find in the maze of the Colorado a point to cross the river chasm. They looked for ten days and were forced to eat boiled cactus and two of their horses before finding a place to ford; even then, they had to chop out steps to get down and back up the 400-foot perpendicular walls. My crossing, accomplished sitting down, took twenty seconds. What I saw as a remarkable sight the Spaniards saw as a terror that nearly did them in.

Escalante's struggles gave perspective to the easy passage I'd enjoyed across 6,000 miles of America. Other than weather, some bad road, and a few zealous policemen, my difficulties had been only those of mind.

I went up an enormous geologic upheaval called the Kaibab Plateau; with startling swiftness, the small desert bushes changed to immense conifers as the Kaibab forest deepened: ponderosa, fir, spruce. At 6,000 feet, the temperature was sixty—a drop of thirty degrees in ten miles. On the north edge of the forest, the highway made a long, gliding descent off the plateau into Utah. Here lay Kane and Garfield counties, a place of multicolored rock and baroque stone columns and, under it all, the largest unexploited coalfield in the country. A land certain one day to be fought over.

ICROSSED THE CASCADES ON OREGON 58. ALTHOUGH the mountains were not particularly high, the road made steep climbs and drops over timbered slopes, and runaway-truck escape ramps looked like ski jumps. On the western side, humidity increased and ferns grew thick as jungle vines. For a while, desert lay behind.

At noon, the journey began a kind of sea change that started when I drove up an old logging road into the recesses of Salt Creek, a stream working hard to beat itself to a lather. In Missouri, when a man's whereabouts come into question, the people say he's “gone up Salt Creek.” It's a place you disappear into. Maybe I should have taken warning.

After a sandwich, I poked about the woods. Then three things, quite unconnected, began to stack themselves like crystals into a pattern.

First: Waiting on rain, I studied the map. Where to go? South lay two towns of fine name—Lookingglass and Riddle—but I would have to backtrack sixty wet miles, and already the desert showers had left me prey to the “Oregon blues,” that dissipation of spirit that accompanies the rainy periods, when suicides noticeably increase. But Lookingglass—what a name!

Second: The town recalled to me a line from Walter de la Mare: "Things are the mind's mute looking-glass."

Third: Still waiting on the weather, I started reading a book I'd bought in Phoenix, *The Sacred Pipe*, Black Elk's account of the ancient rites of the Oglala Sioux. In contrast to the good and straight red road of life, Black Elk says, the blue road is the route of "one who is distracted, who is ruled by his senses, and who lives for himself rather than for his people." I was stunned. Was it racial memory that had urged me to drive 7,000 miles of blue highway, a term I thought I had coined?

That's when something opened like a window shade unexpectedly rattling up in a dark room. A sudden, new cast of light. What need for a man to make a trip to Looking-

glass, Oregon, when he'd been seeing his own image all across the length of the country? De la Mare was right—a mirror may not reflect mind, but a man's response to landscapes, faces, events, does. My skewed vision was that of a man looking at himself by looking at what he looks at.

Hadn't I even made a traveling companion of the great poet of ego, the one who sings of himself, who promises to "effuse egotism and show it underlying all," who finds the earth his own likeness? Whitman:

To me the converging objects of the universe
perpetually flow,

All are written to me, and I must get what the writing
means.



MOSAIC

1. THE SACRIFICE

On this tile
the knife
like a sickle moon hangs
in the painted air
as if it had learned a dance
of its own,
the way the boy has
among the vivid
breakable flowers,
the way Abraham has
among the boulders,
his two feet heavy
as stones.

2. NEAR SINAI

God's hand here
is the size of a tiny cloud,
and the wordless tablets
he holds out
curve like the temple doors.
Moses, reaching up
must see on their empty surface
laws chiseled in his mind
by the persistent wind
of the desert, by wind
in the bulrushes.

3. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

We know
by the halos
that circle these heads
like rings around planets
that the small donkey
has carried his burden
away from the thunder
of the Old Testament
into the lightning
of the New.

4. AT THE ARMENIAN TILE SHOP

Under the bright glazes
Esau watches Jacob,
Cain watches Abel.
With the same heavy eyes
the tilemaker's Arab assistant
watches me,
all of us wondering
why for every pair
there is just one
blessing.

—Linda Pastan

Money half gone, I'd come up with a bit of epistemological small change.

Not knowing what else to do, I drove off westward. The highway rolled out of the mountains into the basin of the Willamette River, a broad trough with at least as many shades of green as the Irishman can count in Eire. The level and verdant valley should have been soothing after so much aridness and stone, so much up and down, but I sat absorbed in my own blue funk.

Old Oregon 99 led into the clean college town of Corvallis. I had no heart for more road. For two days, two days of drizzle, I wandered around Corvallis more dispirited than edified by the blue-road perception. I walked and walked. "Nothing," Homer sings, "is harder on mortal man than wandering." That's why the words "travel" and "travail" have a common origin.

During those days, I was drawn to telephones, and on four occasions I dropped in coins and four times I put the receiver back. On the fifth I didn't.

"Hello?" the Cherokee said.

"It's me."

A quiet. "Could I call you back?"

Well, boys, there you have it. Struggling to put it all out of mind, I went to the university library to find how Lookingglass, the town I hadn't seen, got its name. One theory held that Lookingglass was a local Indian who so admired himself he always carried a small mirror. Well, boys . . .

WHAT DOES THE TRAVELER DO AT NIGHT IN A strange town when he wants conversation? In the United States, there's usually a single choice—a tavern.

The Oil City Bar, in Shelby, Montana, was north of the railroad tracks, near the spot where the Great Northern accidentally founded Shelby in 1891 by dumping off an old boxcar. From it the town grew, and the antecedents still showed.

One of the authors of the Montana Federal Writers' Project describes Shelby in the 1890s as

the sort of town that producers of western movies have ever since been trying to reproduce in papier-mâché. . . . The town playboys were featured in the *Police Gazette* after holding up an opera troupe passing through on a railroad train. . . . They shot out the engine headlight, the car windows, and the red signal lights, and forced the conductor to execute a clog dance.

I was out looking around to see how the old Wild West was doing when I came across the Oil City Bar. Although the night had turned cold and gusty, only the screen door was closed; the wooden one stood open so men in down vests wouldn't overheat. A shattered pool cue lay in the corner, and to one side was a small room lighted only by the blue-neon flicker of a beer sign—the kind of light you could go mad in. Left of the ten-point buck trophy and above the gallon jars of pickled pigs' feet and hard-boiled

eggs hung a big lithograph of a well-formed woman, shotgun in hand. She was duck hunting. Other than her rubber boots, she wore not a stitch.

A man somewhat taller than the barstool and dressed in yellow from shoulders to cowboy boots drank with assembly-line regularity. He leered wobbly-eyed at the huntress, tried to speak, but blew a bubble instead.

I blame what was about to happen to him on the traditional design of the American bar: a straight counter facing a mirrored wall, which forces the customer to stare at himself or put a crick in his neck looking at someone else. The English build their bars in circles or horseshoes or right angles—anything to get another face in your line of sight. Their bars, as a result, are more sociable. The American stares into his own face, or at bottles of golden liquors, or at whatever hangs above the bar; conversation declines and drinking increases. If the picture above the bar is a nude—as is common in old western bars—you have an iconography for creating unfulfilled desire: the reality of a man's own six o'clock face below the dream of perfect flesh.

I turned away from the huntress to watch a pool game. There was a loud *flump* beside me. Knees to his chest, the man in yellow lay dead drunk on the floor. He looked like a cheese curl. His friend said, "Chuckie's one good little drinker."

A woman of sharp face, pretty ten years ago, kept watching me. She had managed to pack her hips into what she hoped was a pair of mean jeans; a cigarette was never out of her mouth, and, after every deep draw, her exhalations were smokeless. She was trying for trouble, but I minded my own business. More or less. The man with her, Lonnie, walked up to me. He looked as if he were made out of whipcord. "Like that lady?" he said.

"What lady is that?"

"One you been staring at."

"Without my glasses, I can't distinguish a man from a woman." That was a lie.

"The lady said you were distinguishing her pretty good."

Some fading face trying to make herself the center of men's anger, proving she could still push men to their limits.

"Couldn't recognize her from here if I did know her."

He pressed up close. Trouble coming. "Don't tell *me*," he said. "Happens all the time. She thinks men stare at her."

"Look. No offense, but I've no interest in the woman."

"I can see it, and she can see it, and that's the trouble. But let's talk."

It was an act he had been coerced into. He was faking it. He called for two beers and set one in front of me. "Take it," he said. "When I sit down, I'm going to tell her you apologized for staring but you just thought she was one hell of a fox. Don't make a liar out of me."

He walked off. That was the silliest row I never got into.

I went to the restroom. When I came out, Lonnie was standing at the bar and the woman had gone to sit with three other women. She didn't buy it, I thought.

"Trouble?" I said.

"Forget it. She works with those broads. Casterating bitches every one."

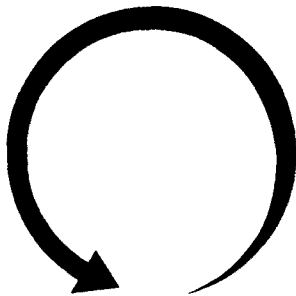
There was a commotion that got loud and moved outside to the windy street. Two men from Mountain Bell, the phone company, were going to fight. They came at each other, locked outstretched arms, and pushed, circling slowly as if turned by the prairie wind. They tired and revolved more slowly, but neither let go or fell down. A police car drove up and honked. The fighters went to the squad car, both leaning on the window to listen. After a while, they slumped off in opposite directions, and that was the end of it.

Lonnie and I watched from the bar. After it was over, he said, "Jack Dempsey had a real fight here."

"A fight in this very bar?"

"Not a bar fight—heavyweight boxing. Shelby built a grandstand for it. Forty thousand seats. Seven thousand people showed up. Town almost went bust."

The woman came over to Lonnie and said, "Let's go." She was mad. I left soon after, walking out into the streets of the new Wild West.



AT THE HIGH-LINE TOWN OF CULBERTSON, I TURNED north toward treeless Plentywood, Montana, then went east again, down forsaken blue Highway 5, a road virtually on the forty-ninth parallel, which is the Canadian border in North Dakota. In a small flourish of hills, the last I was to see for hundreds of miles, on an up-thrust lump sat a cube of concrete with an Air Force radar antenna sweeping the long horizon for untoward blips. A Martello tower of the twentieth century. Below the installation, in the Ice Age land, lay a fine, clear lake. Fingerlings whisked the marsh weed, coots twittered on the surface, and at bankside a muskrat munched greens. It seemed as if I were standing between two worlds. But they were one: a few permutations of life going on about themselves, each thing trying to continue its way.

East of Fortuna, North Dakota, just eight miles south of Saskatchewan, the high-moraine wheat fields took up the whole landscape. There was nothing else, except piles of stones like Viking burial mounds at the verges of tracts and big rock-pickers running steely fingers through the glacial soil to glean stone that freezes had heaved to the surface; behind the machines, the fields looked vacuumed.

At a filling station, a man who had long farmed the moraine said the great ice sheets had gone away only to get more rock. "They'll be back. They always come back. What's to stop them?"

The country gave up the glacial hills and flattened to perfection. The road went on, on, on. Straight and straight. Ahead and behind, it ran through me like an arrow. North Dakota up here was a curveless place—not just roads but land, people too, and the flight of birds. Things were angular: fenceposts against the sky, the line of a jaw, the ways of mind, the lay of crops.

The highway, oh, the highway. No place, in theory, is boring of itself. Boredom lies only with the traveler's limited perception and his failure to explore deeply enough. After a while, I found my perception limited. The Great Plains, showing so many miles in an immodest exposure of itself, wearied my eyes; the openness was overdrawn.

You'd think anything giving variety to this near blankness would be prized, yet when a Pleistocene pond got in the way, the road cut right through it, never yielding its straightness to nature. If you fired a rifle down the highway, a mile or so east you'd find the spent slug in the middle of the blacktop.

Here the earth, as if to prove its immensity, empties itself. Gertrude Stein said: "In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. This is what makes America what it is." Onward across the appallingly featureless yonder of North Dakota, where towns, like the poor verse of Burma Shave signs, came and went quickly; on across fields where farmers planted wheat, rye, barley, and flax, their tractors sowing close to fences marking off missile silos that held Minutemen waiting in the dark underground like seeds of another sort. As daylight went, the men, racing rain and the short growing season, switched on headlights to keep the International Harvesters moving over cropland that the miracles of land-grant colleges (cross-pollinated hybrids resistant to everything but growth and petrochemicals) had changed forever. The farmer's enemy wasn't a radar blip—it was the wild oat.

In the city park at Langdon, a Nordic town of swept streets and tidy pastel houses with pastel shutters at the picture windows, a man walking with a child saw me staring at a "retired" Spartan missile apparently serving the same function that courthouse-lawn fieldpieces with little pyramids of cannonballs once did. The white Spartan, a skeletal finger pointing into the beyond, was undefaced by initials, lovers' notations, graduating-class years, or spray-can anarchy. The only blemishes were a smudgy ring of handprints, from children who had tested the reality of the thing, and this—penciled small, near the bottom, as if to hide it:

WARNING: THE SURGEON GENERAL HAS DETERMINED THAT SMOKING ICBM'S ARE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH.

"She's a nuke," the father said with proprietary pride.

His shirt sleeves were rolled to the elbows, and he carried a full complement of ball-point pens in a plastic pocket protector above his heart. "We're lucky to have her here. Came from a silo at Nekoma. Air Force selected our town."

"I've seen a lot of missile installations along the highway."

"Make you feel good, don't they? Proud and taken care of, like."

"Taken care of—that's it."

"From a distance, in the right light, this bird looks like a church steeple. And I promise you, if these things ever start flying, she'll be the mother we'll be praying to."

"Our Lady of the Unholy Boom?"

He ignored me. "I don't mean these old Spartans. I'm talking about the new Minutemen. Or the MX, when it gets approved—and it will. Ten nuke warheads on the MX."

His daughter fell in the grass. Without a drop of irony, he cautioned her to be careful.

"Do you believe they'll be used?" I asked.

"This one's deactivated, of course. But I promise you we're ready for the Soviets up here. The Canadian border is only seventeen miles away. You ask if they'll ever be fired. As long as Moscow is insane for conquest, don't bet against it." He waited for a response, then flagged his arm to the northeast. "Walhalla's the next town over, and you know what that is."

"What is it?"

"The home of warriors slain in battle. The place the Valkyries carry heroes to. We're ready, here on the perimeter."

"The Air Force is ready, you mean."

"I don't tell tales out of school, but some of us are personally equipped."

"With what?"

"Let's just say we have basements stocked for whoever crosses that border."

"I hope you don't have the other cast-off ICBMs in your rumpus rooms."

"Everybody worries about ICBMs. We live on top of them up here. We grow the bread you *and* the Russians eat, right over the missiles. You want to worry? Worry about IBM. Worry about bug bombs. But with what the generals got over there in the Ukraine—those ICBMs that carry ten times the kilotons of our biggest—don't fret yourself about this baby." Parentally patting the Spartan, he dislodged the ball-points in his pocket protector, then repositioned them precisely to make sure he would reach the aftermath free of ink stains.

BACKOO, NORTH DAKOTA, MAY NOT BE THE ONLY town in America named after an Australian river (the Barcoo), but then again, maybe it is. I went to see it, or, as it turned out, to see what was left, which was: the Burlington Northern tracks, a grain elevator, a gro-

cery, a boarded-up school, a church, and a thimble of a post office. The town had closed for Saturday, so I started back to the highway; after a mile, the smell of gasoline stopped me. I lifted the hood. The fuel line below the gas filter had split and was arcing a fine jet of no-lead into the sunlight. I tried to wire it closed, but it didn't work.

I made for Cavalier, the nearest town. I pulled into the first garage I saw. A teenaged boy with the belly of a man came out and stared. People don't just throw words around in the North. I lifted the hood to show him the line. I didn't speak either.

"Sumbitch's likely to catch fire!" he said.

"I know that. Can you fix it?"

"Pull the sumbitch in the bay fast and shut her down. God damn!" He backed off a safe distance as I drove in.

"Have you got that hose?"

He pointed toward a big coil of hose hanging on the greasy wall. "Fix every sumbitch in the state if we had to." The boy's blackened hands grappled with the connection. He struggled, cut himself, cursed, and took off on an analgesic tour of the grease pit, blood seeping from his oily finger. I picked up the pliers and tried to free the clamp. My hand slipped as the connection popped loose, and I cut my finger. The boy sliced a piece of hose off the coil and clamped it in place. "That'll take care of the sumbitch," he said.

"Very speedy service. What do I owe you?"

"A dime for the hose and two bucks for the labor—that'll take care of the leak. But it won't do anything about the real problem under your hood. Water pump's about to go." He grabbed the fan blades and pulled them back and forth. "Shouldn't be no play in the fan. When those bearings give, fan's coming through your radiator and that'll be all she wrote."

"I've been keeping an eye on it."

"How long's it been like that?"

"About 9,000 miles, I guess."

He slapped his forehead to indicate my stupidity. "Suum-bitch!"

"Trying to buy a little time."

"You're gonna buy a lot more than time when that sumbitch goes. I wouldn't even drive the sumbitch to Hoople."

"How far's Hoople?"

"Eighteen miles."

"Can you fix it?"

"Wouldn't try. Take it to the Ford dealer."

So I did. The service man said, "Can't get parts on Saturday. In fact, I couldn't get a pump before Monday afternoon—if then. All of our parts come out of Grand Forks, so you might as well drive down there yourself."

"Can I make it?" For 9,000 miles I hadn't worried, but now I worried about seventy.

"*Quièn sabe*, podnah. You know? Maybe you make it home. Then again, maybe you won't make it to Hoople."

I went down State 18 toward Grand Forks and wondered what this Hoople place was that figured as a basic guide to

distance in Pembina County, North Dakota. I couldn't get to Grand Forks before five o'clock, so I drove slowly, relaxed in my fate. The truck had carried me to the eastern seaboard and then to the Pacific and halfway back to the Atlantic. But now, of course, the sumbitch might not make it to Hoople.

Who in America would guess that Grand Forks, North Dakota, was a good place to be stuck in with a bad water pump? Skyscrapers from the thirties, clean as a Norwegian kitchen, a state university with brick, big trees, and ivy. On Monday morning the pump got replaced in an hour for \$37.50. I had expected to be taken for three times that figure, but I met only honest people.

THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR BANAL CONVERSATION. Across the central North, conversations were difficult to strike up. The people were polite but reserved; often they seemed afraid of appearing too inquisitive, while at other times they were simply too taciturn to exchange the banalities and clichés necessary to find a base for conversation.

When I walked the North towns, people, wondering who the outsider was, would look at me; but as soon as I nodded they looked down, up, left, or right, or turned around as if summoned by an invisible caller. "Stranger," Whitman says, "if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me?" I even tried my old stratagem of taking a picture of a blank wall just to give a passerby an excuse to stop and ask what I could possibly be photographing. Nothing breaks down suspicion about a stranger better than curiosity—except in the North; whatever works better there, I didn't discover. The effect on me was that I felt more alone than I ever had in the desert. I wished for the South, where any topic is worth at least a brief exchange. And so I went across the central North, seeing many people, but not often learning where our lives crossed common ground.

BLUE HIGHWAY 109 RAN THROUGH NEW HAMPSHIRE, out from under the Ossipee Mountains, down toward the sea, all the way twisting like snarled fishline as it unreeled through an eerie spruce forest. I crossed into Maine, where evergreens absorbed the heat and the sky darkened. Lakes glowed luminescent in the last light, the water sending wisps of condensation into the cool air.

A heavy sea fog came in to muffle the obscure woods and lie over the land like a sheet of dirty muslin. I saw no cars or people, few lights in the houses. The windshield wipers, brushing at the fog, switched back and forth like cats' tails. I lost myself to the monotonous rhythm and darkness as past and present fused and dim things came and went in a staccato of moments separated by miles of darkness. On the road, where change is continuous and visible, time is

not; rather it is something the rider only infers. Time is not the traveler's fourth dimension—change is.

Kennebunkport was a town coming and going, a place in that way like any other. A quarter of a mile up the estuary from the ocean, the citizens once built large wooden ships on the north side of the river and unloaded fish downstream on the south. At Government Wharf they still unload fish and lobsters, and the boat building continues too, but on a smaller scale.

The rain passed inland, and by morning the sky was clear and warm and squealing with gulls scratching themselves in flight. In 1830, some of the townspeople sighted a sea monster, but things now were quieter, except during the summer, and that was the way it had been for almost a century. I did what you do in Kennebunkport: walk the odd angles and sudden turns of alleyways and cul-de-sacs among the bleached, shingled buildings, climb the exterior stairs to the old lofts, step around lobster pots and up-turned dinghies.

The summer season was coming on, and already middle matrons in non-skid-sole shoes and wraparound skirts were leading middle-level husbands into shops rigged out in macramé and down counters of perfumed candles, stained-glass mobiles, Snoopy beach towels, brass trivets, ceramic coffee mugs from Japan, music-box cheeseboards, ladybug jewelry. Clerks, a generation younger, watched with expressions stuck on like decals.

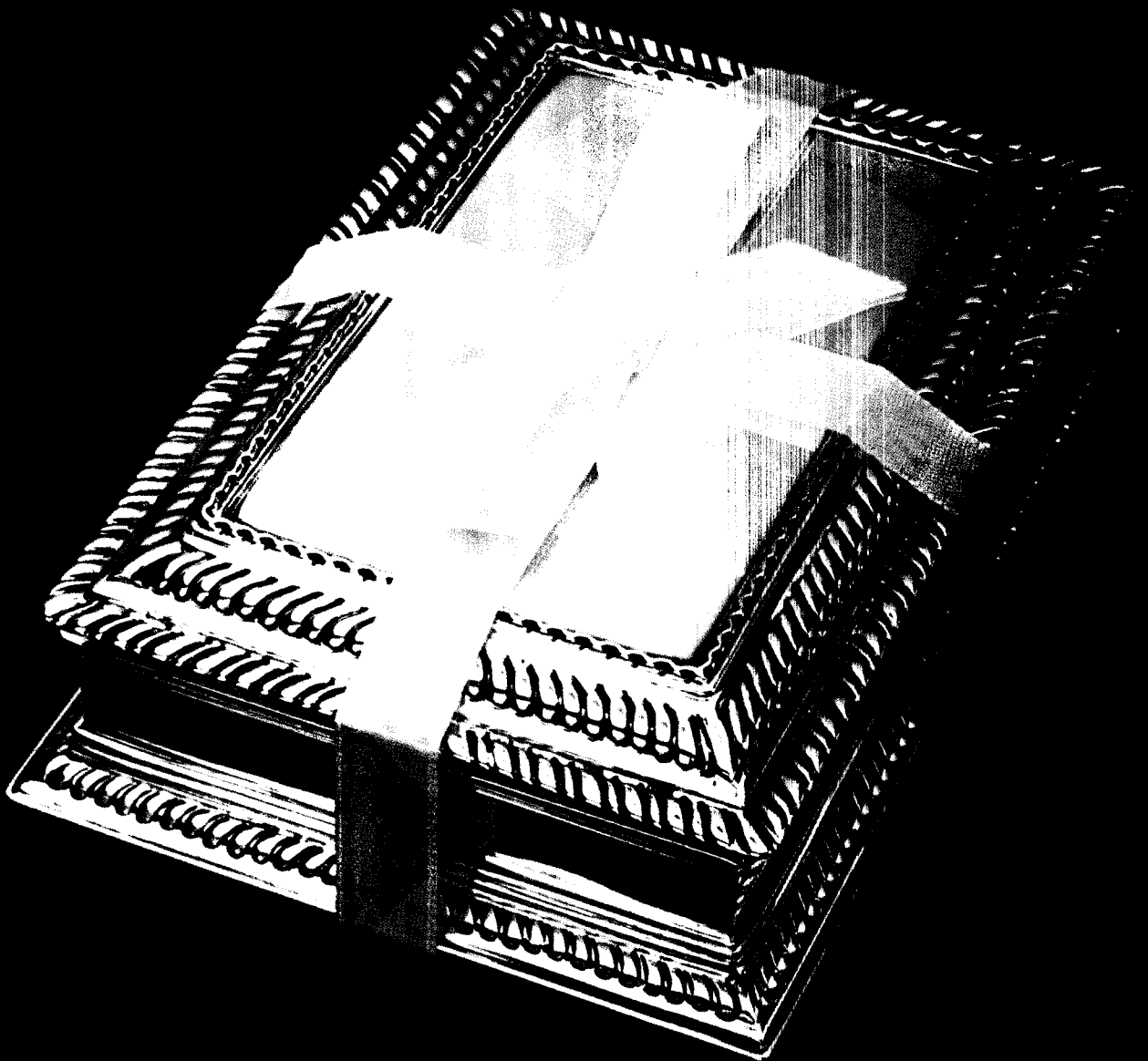
Most of those visitors stayed on the north side of the river with the gift shops and galleries selling paintings by artistes, with the motels, restaurants, and tour-boat docks; but a few found the south-side eateries, small and slanty, the ones on pilings out over the river; and some people even wandered into the boatyards, where winches and cranes clanked out the old music of the harbor.

I went down to the shore. People lay in the sand of a narrow beach blocked at both ends by big, broken mounds of glaciated rocks. Children dug holes, mothers read fat novels by women with three names, and fathers read the coeds' damp T-shirts. Later the women would stretch out on towels, the men would doze off under *The Wall Street Journal*, and the children would look for something to do away from the blowing sand, cold water, and 600 yards of salted humanity.

I drove a hilly back road a couple of miles up the coast to Cape Porpoise, a white-picket-fence village bent around a little balloon of an inlet off the Atlantic. Here, in 1629, Englishmen made the first so-called permanent settlement in Kennebunkport. Sixty years later, Indians "depopulated" Cape Porpoise. That first settlement was on Stage Island, now an overgrown rise that loons and gulls rallied on.

At the edge of the town pier was a lobster house. Lobsters were beyond my means, but I bought two pounds of steamed quahogs (also called "littlenecks" and "cherry-stones" when small), walked to Bradbury Brothers gro-

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HEDGES



While the other networks were kidding around, CNN was covering the Falkland Islands crisis.

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cery for a stick of butter and two bottles of Molson ale. I packed up my dented aluminum pot and Swedish stove and headed down through the sumac and wild beach roses to a rocky coign of vantage just above a tidal cove that Vikings likely saw. While the tide went out, I melted the butter and warmed the clam broth, dipped the steamers into the broth and hot butter, and ate, sitting against the granite, drinking the Molson's, watching the water.

The tide drained the flats, their seaworn things once belonging in the air returned to it for a short space: sunken punts, busted lobster pots, barnacled timbers, pop bottles. And there were banks of shining, steely-blue mussels closed tighter than the lips of God. At one time, only gulls harvested the black mussel, but when the tidal-flat clams and lobsters became harder to find, people began gathering mussels for steaming, and now they, too, were not so plentiful.

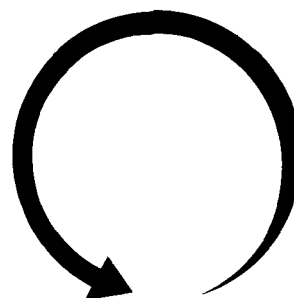
Herring gulls, flashing white in the sun, circled down and let loose their hullabaloo, picked over the flats, and cocked a careful eye at little tidal pools full of orange rockweed and iridescent froth washing gently back and forth. They stitched the rank, black ooze with an embroidery of gull feet.

I went again to the pier. Old men came down in Valiants and Dodge Darts and stood watching the fishing boats. Someone said they came every day, just like the gulls. When one died off, another always took his place to do the watching.

A westerly had blown in strong, and the little Cape Porpoise fleet was returning early, each boat carrying into the pier an attendant flapdoodle of gulls circling as sternmen gutted the catch, then swooping the water for the pitched entrails. Trucks from Boston fish houses waited under the hoist as the fishtubs came up. Gill-netters tore mackerel loose from nets and threw them into baskets. The mackerel is a beautiful piece of design: a sleek body of silver touched with indigo. An old watcher said, "A mack looks better than it eats, unless you're a cat."

The trawler *Allison E* tied up to unload her catch of flounder, cod, haddock, and hake. The skipper climbed the pier ladder and said, "It's steak and potatoes for me, boys." He kept an eye on the trawler as his crew cut the last of the catch, and he counted the baskets of fish coming up to the truck.

The *Allison E* was the last to unload. When she moved off to tie up in the little basin, the pier emptied. In late afternoon, schoolboys came down with their Zebcos to fish for pollock. They filched chunks of cod and flounder from the foul shed, where lobster bait festered in barrels—the stronger the bait, the better to lure a lobster. One small boy struggled out with a massive codfish head, its jagged maw—a good fourteen inches across—gaping wide enough to swallow him. In the harbor, red-throated loons paddled and dived and gulped, but the boys had no luck and went home when the eastern sky and sea turned inky in the dusk.



THE ISLAND OF RHODE ISLAND IS A MISSHAPEN BOOT in Narragansett Bay; just above the instep stands the old town center of Newport, and around the sole stepping into the Atlantic is the other Newport—that of the exclusive oceanside gilded estate "cottages," detached in space, attitude, and history. Old harborside Newport, however historic, was never quaint; it was much too rough and lusty for that. Nor was it ever a preserved relic like Wickford or picturesquely cute like Little Compton, other Rhode Island coastal villages. In short, it was a sea town.

I'd spent my share of Navy time in Newport down on Thames Street—also known as Bloody Alley—which had ever been the waterfront thoroughfare, although things had slipped and no longer was it the main business street. But in the seventeenth century only a madman or a seer might have predicted that upstart New York City would have an avenue more important than the Alley.

Thames Street—a narrow, dark trench of a lane under hip roofs and gables and old doorways with fanlights—had seen the likes of Captain Kidd, Roger Williams, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Lafayette, Rochambeau, Kosciuszko, Baron Steuben, Count von Fersen (a lover of Marie Antoinette), Nathanael Greene, Gilbert Stuart, Stephen Decatur, Oliver Perry (Battle of Lake Erie), Matthew Perry (opening of Japan), Herman Melville, most of the Vanderbilts, Astors, and Rockefellers, and a thousand-thousand fishermen and sailors. Not bad for a street that began as a swamp.

Citizens of Newport hanged pirates at the north end of the Alley, buccaneers and merchants refitted ships at the Thames Street wharfs, and Englishmen impressed American seamen they found wandering "the Strand," as it once was called. The first cobblestones were bought with receipts levied on each slave imported from Africa. (Later, any Negro who owned a pig and sty could vote in a mock election for a black governor at the corner of Thames and Farewell streets.) In one house nearby, a boy in his father's arms, upon seeing George Washington, said, "Why Father! General Washington is a man!" To which the General replied, "Yes, only a man."

After the British stole the town blind and devastated the area, following their three-year occupation during the Revolutionary War, new businesses grew up around Thames: sugar refining, rum distilling, malt brewing, the

bottling of sperm whale oil. Sea captains' children, hoping for a pet monkey or a parrot from Brazil, came down to Thames Street to meet their fathers' ships; officers of the line walked between piled boxes of Turkish brass, Chinese porcelain, Persian carpets, Japanese lacquerware, Indian spices; and they caroused in clubs where they drank Newport punch made of rum, lime juice, arrack, and loaf sugar.

Before the Civil War, summer colonists from Charleston, Mobile, Havana, and the Indies strolled the Strand, although few stayed after dusk. Fishermen pitched pennies and bet on impromptu dog fights and sold fish from wheelbarrows on Bannister's Wharf.

When I saw Thames Street the first time, in the sixties, it was still a dark little guttery thing filled with the odor of beer and fried food and dimestore perfume; the noise was music, shouts, laughter, gull screeches. The Navy remained its main order of business. At five o'clock on a summer evening, when the Alley really came to, you saw pressed white uniforms of the gobs, shining black oxfords, and faces wiped down with Old Spice; but as the street emptied in the dark morning, the uniforms now smudged and rumpled and stinking of beer, there would be vomiting and sometimes fights. Only when the cup races brought the regatta to town would high society (the Four Hundred) and the gentlemen from the War College come down to the Alley to play at the nautical life. Then the attitude was: SAILORS AND DOGS KEEP OUT.

Newport entrepreneurs neglected Thames, because they believed that Broadway and the north-end highways should have the new commercial growth, and so shopping centers saved the Alley from the twentieth century. From one war to the next, waterfront changes were small and slow, and the past, seamy and seedy and alive, continued. I came to like the street. It possessed something rare.

Now, nearly fifteen years since I'd last seen it, I walked into the lane where Washington Square—actually more an isosceles triangle—meets the old Long Wharf. The harbor side of the street was gone. Where seventeenth and eighteenth-century buildings had stood were parking lots and a mall. My expectation sank as if flushed down a scupper. Most of the city side of the street (now called America's Cup Avenue) had been modernized into trendy shops of concrete and glass that sold plastic scrimshaw, driftwood lamps, lighted whelk shells, garish seascapes, marijuana-leaf belt buckles.

The seamen's taverns had yielded to places with oldestyle signs: SPIRITS AND VICTUALS. GROG HAPPY HOUR. Navy outfitters were now women's shoe shops; tattoo parlors had become perfume boutiques.

I stopped for a beer. The bartender brought a Narragansett. I asked what had happened to Thames Street. "Redevelopment for urban blight."

The bar was crowded. America's Cup Avenue was clearly a moneymaker. A man, young, said, "They trashed the place to save it. The American plan."

"How did it happen?"

"Navy cut back. Businessmen wanted tourists who'll spend more than sailors."

"But the history."

"American history is parking lots."

The room was full of girls with orchid-colored lips, signed trousers, and disco pumps; hands full of high-technology cigarettes and sugary, Day-Glo drinks; faces agog with the fal-lal and frippery of the new Thames Street. They jabbered with twenty-one-year-old men of all ages.

Somewhere between that vile past and the vacuous present, somewhere between history and trends, there must have been other possibilities for Thames Street that the burghers of Newport missed.

There was no point staying on; what I'd come for was gone, replaced by things available all over the United States.

The Newport-Jamestown ferry was extinct too, superseded by a two-mile bridge. I said to the toll keeper, "Damn expensive bridge—the toll, that is."

"We got a joke here. It's high because it's high. Get it? They built it so aircraft carriers at Quonset Point could sail under. As soon as the paint dried, the Navy pulled its bird-farms out of Narragansett Bay."

"What's the bridge here for, anyway?"

"Opens Newport up to New York City traffic. Lotta new businesses to support here now."

They might just as well have opened the old harbor town to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. I went on toward Quonset Point, the home port of the ship I had been assigned to. The *U.S.S. Lake Champlain*, a World War II flattop, once held the transatlantic speed record, and it pulled out of the sea America's first spaceman, Alan Shepard. I'd heard the carrier was sold for scrap, but I wanted to see the ships that had taken her berth—if I could get permission to go on the pier.

As things turned out, I didn't need to worry about permission. On the west side of the base, where Seabees invented the Quonset hut, was a carnival. The new Navy, I thought. I drove down the long road to the air station and wondered what excuse might get me in—ironic after all the time I'd spent years ago thinking up reasons to get out.

But the gates were open, sentry boxes unmanned, the ten-foot chain-link fence torn and leaning. Still, I expected base security any minute. One of the mess halls had a name on it like a restaurant. The new volunteer Navy.

At the end of the road, a mile in, the big pier was empty. Nothing but rusting stanchions and bollards, and weeds along the railroad tracks. The whole bay stood open and vacant. The *Champ*, the *Essex*, the *Wasp*, used to fill the sky with gray masses of hull, gun, and antennas. The great carriers were gone, and also tugs, tenders, big naval cranes, helicopters, jets; the shouts and hubbub and confusion of sailors and machines and aircraft, all gone.

On the shore a man was stacking lobster traps. Lobster traps? "What the hell's happened here?" I shouted over to

him, but it didn't carry. I walked out on the pier, where a lone tern watched. Once there was a gull for every sailor. Lobster traps! I was angry at seeing my service come to this. I had lived and died walking off and on this pier and many times had dreamed of the day I'd come back as a civilian, free of the tyranny of the boatswain's pipe and his curses, free of working in a 125-degree steel box. I felt cheated.

Where in hell was the diesel oil of yesteryear? Where the drawn faces when we left, the cockahoop faces when we returned, the sailors kissing girls and lugging seabags, mahogany statues, brass platters, straw hats, and black velvet paintings of bulls and naked native women; trucks honking, the sailors on duty cursing down from the deck and offering services to the women, the sea wind snapping the flag from the jackstaff, the last smoke blowing grit on us from the tall stacks? And now lobster pots! Christ. I knew you couldn't go home again, but nobody had said anything about not getting back to your old Navy base.

A horn blared. A man with a bulgy, bulbous head shouted, "Got official business out here, Mac?" That was more like it. He was a Rhode Island Port Authority watchman with all the command bearing of a dirty rag, but he was better than nothing. He did his best to be properly official, writing my license number down on his clipboard. "What's your name, Mac?" That was much more like it.

"I was stationed here on the *Champ*, CVS-39. She was a sub hunter."

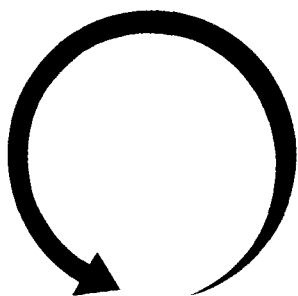
"What's your name?"

"Drexel."

"What's your first name?"

"That's it. Drexel. Drexel Twitty. I can't believe it's all gone."

"Never saw it before the Navy turned it over to us. Okay, sailor, take your look-see and get your butt out of here by dark." He drove off, and that was my triumphal return to Quonset Point Naval Air Station.



ON TILGHMAN ISLAND, MARYLAND, I PARKED NEAR the wharf where much of the last sail-powered fishing fleet in America tied up. Against the clouding sky, I could make out the tall masts and long bowsprits of the skipjacks, ships that hoist 1,200 feet of sail to pull port and starboard dredges over the oyster rocks. Some people

believed the skipjacks were the last of an era while others held they were, once again, the future.

A storm came on, and I ran for Ghost Dancing. Inside, I listened to the rain beat out a hard, steely number on the roof; not yet ready for sleep, I lay on the bunk to watch the electric night.

Black Elk loved thunderstorms, because in their "swift fire" he heard the Great Voices. For me, I heard more the Heyokas, those beings of lightning, those dancing human clowns who do things foolishly backward. In his time on the blue road, the immaterialist Black Elk often heard voices from the clouds; in my season on the blue highways, the voices I heard were those of men—men who knew about stumbling not from observation, as gods know it, but rather from having stumbled. For that reason, their words carried a force cloud voices could not match.

If clouds gave Black Elk his visions, they merely made me wet. But, like any man of ordinary cut, I sometimes heard *human* voices that showed the power not of visions but of revision, the power to see again and revise. Whitman:

Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-glass? is there nothing greater or more?

Does all sit there with you. . . ?

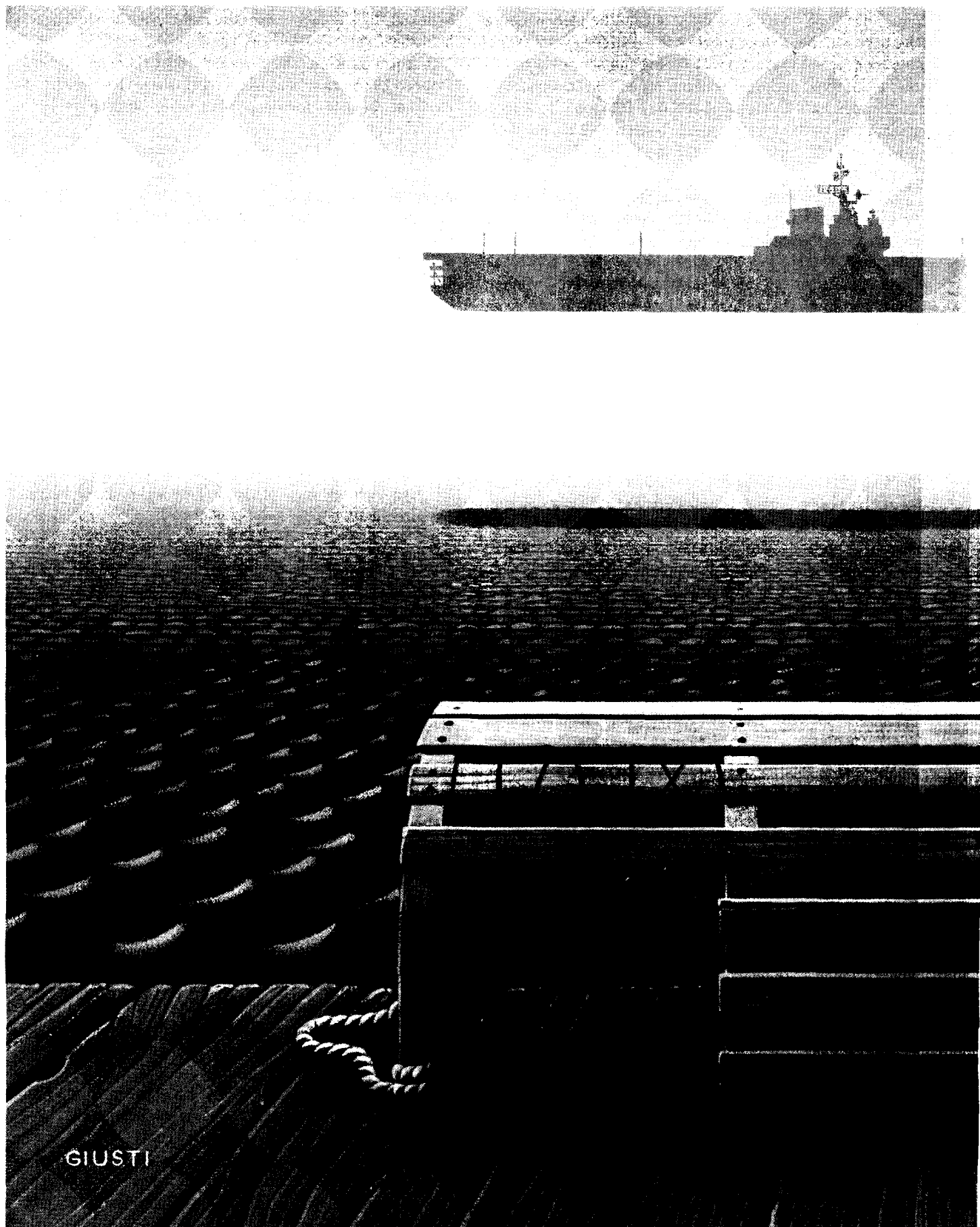
Something opened. Call it the Lookingglass syndrome.

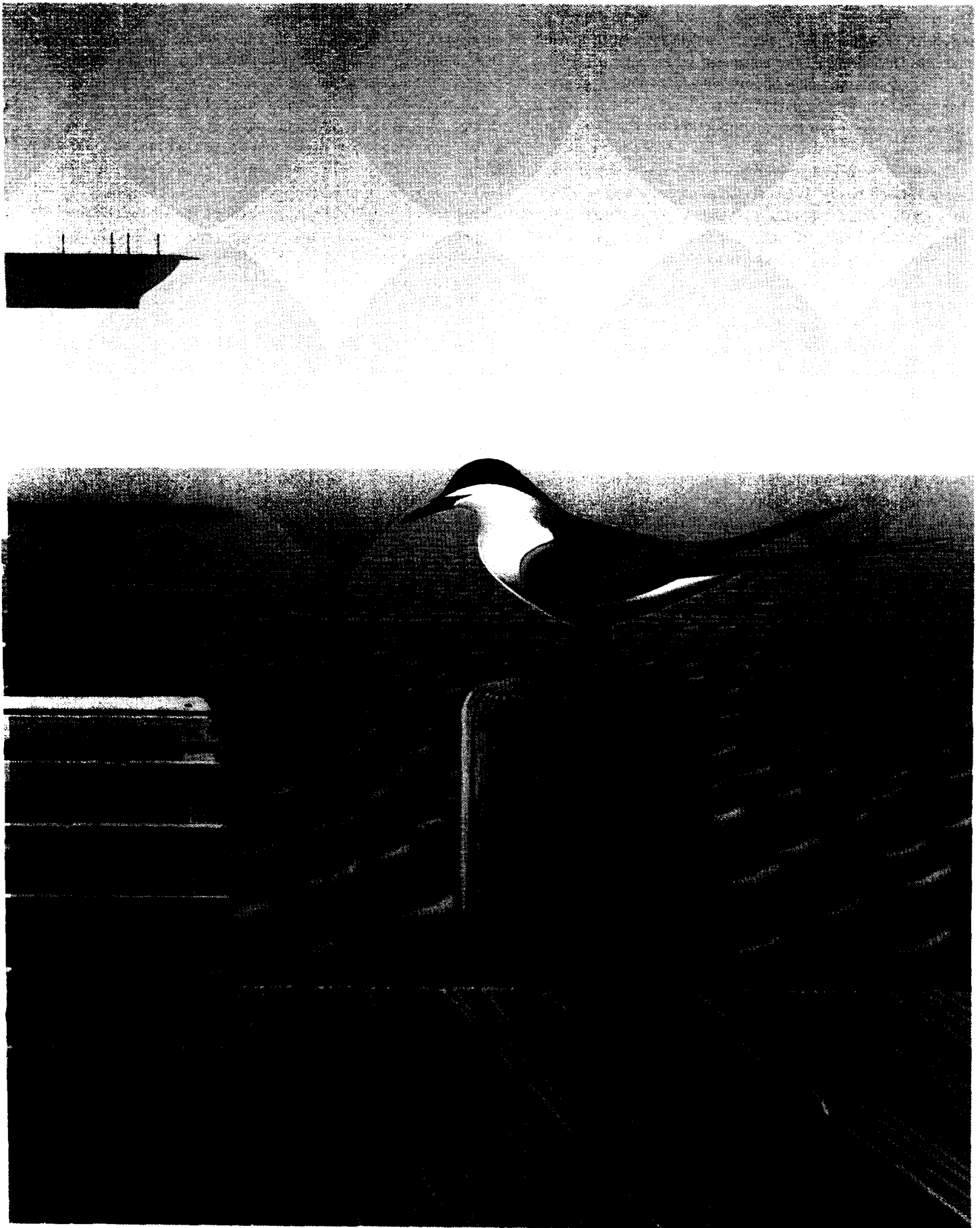
Like a crazed enemy running amok, ego, that excessive looking inward, had had its way in the Indian wars, and now the old life with the Cherokee was lost. But what had not been lost was the chance, as Black Elk says, "to make over." A man cannot remake ego, because it is able to grow only in size, like a simple cell. A locked form unable to change its structure, it is ever only what it is. Not so an angle of vision—that a man could make over. To remake is his potential, his hope. His very form depends not on repetition but upon variation from old patterns. In response to stress, biological survival requires genetic change; it necessitates a turning away from doomed replication. And what of history? Was it different?

Etymology: *educate*, from the Latin *educere*, "to lead out."

AT CINCINNATI, I LOOPED THE CITY FAST ON THE Interstate and came to Indiana 56, where corn, tobacco, and blue-sailors grew to the knee, and also wild carrot, fleabane, golden Alexander. Apples were coming into a high green, butterflies stitched across the road, and all the way the whip of mowers filled Ghost Dancing with the sweet waft of cut grass. Each town had its feed-and-grain store, each farm its grain bin and cornercrib. Rolling, rolling, the land, the road, the truck.

I dropped south to New Harmony, Indiana, twelve miles downstream from Grayville, Illinois, where I'd spent that first grim night. New Harmony in June piles up with the sprinkle from golden-rain trees, here called "gate trees."





The town is known for two experiments in social engineering, both of which failed. Yet those failures put in motion currents that changed the course of what came after: the abolition of slavery, equal opportunity for women, progressive education, emancipation from poverty. The futuristic village was once even the headquarters for the U.S. Geologic Survey.

Rappites from Pennsylvania created the town of Harmonie out of bosky Wabash River bottomland in 1814. They grew wheat, vegetables, grapes, apples, and hops; they produced wine, woolens, tinware, shoes, and whiskey. The Rappite Golden Rose trademark, like the Shaker name, became an assurance of quality. A decade later, however, as the struggle of primitive life eased, members began finding more time for reflection; to blunt a growing discontent, the leader, George Rapp, sold the village to Robert Owen and moved the colony back to Pennsylvania, where the people could again start from scratch and live the peace of full occupation. Seventy-five years later, their Shaker-like refusal to have any truck with the future brought about their disappearance.

Owen, the British industrialist, utopian, and egalitarian, who worked to create a society free of ignorance and selfishness by eliminating the "causes of contest among individuals" (his basic tenet was "circumstances form character"), renamed the town New Harmony and built a cooperative community that developed into a center for creative social and scientific thought in antebellum America. Yet, before the first settler died, egotism and greed did the experiment in. New Harmony survived, but only as a monument to idealism and innovation.

Not far from a burial ground of unmarked graves the old Harmonists share with a millennium of Indians, the mystical Rappites in 1820 planted a circular privet labyrinth

"symbolic" (a sign said) "of their notion of the Harmonist concept of the devious and difficult approach to a state of true harmony." After the Rappites, the hedges disappeared, but a generation ago, citizens replanted the maze. I walked through it to stretch from the long highway. Even though I avoided the shortcut holes broken in the hedges, I still went down the rungs and curves without a single wrong turn. The "right" way was worn so deeply in the earth as to be unmistakable. But without the errors, wrong turns, and blind alleys, without the doubling back and misdirection and fumbling and chance discoveries, there was not one bit of joy in walking the labyrinth. And worse—knowing the way made traveling it perfectly meaningless.

Before I crossed the Wabash (Algonquian for "white shining"), I filled the gas tank—enough for the last leg. From the station I could see the blue highway curving golden into the western afternoon. I'd make Columbia by nightfall.

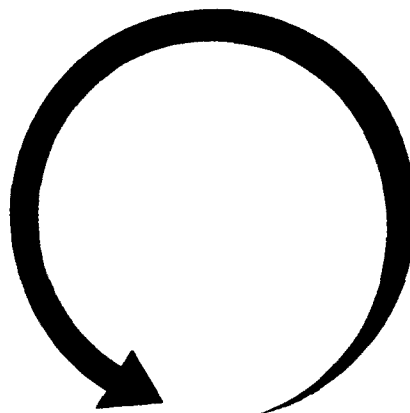
The circle almost complete, the truck ran the road like the old horse that knows the way. If the circle had come full turn, I hadn't. I can't say that, over the miles, I had learned what I wanted to know, because I hadn't known what I wanted to know. But I *did* learn what I didn't know I wanted to know.

The highway before, under, behind. Through the Green-River-ordinance-enforced towns. Past barnlot windmills that said AERMOTOR CHICAGO. On and on. The Mississippi River. Then the oak risings of Missouri.

The pump attendant, looking at my license plate when he had filled the tank, asked, "Where you coming from, Show Me?"

"Where I've been."

"Where else?" he said. □





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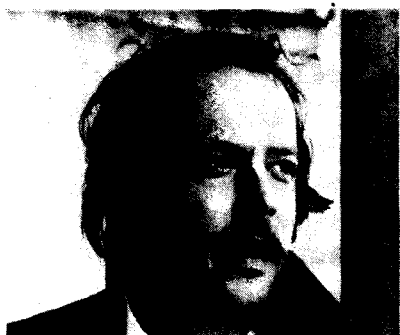


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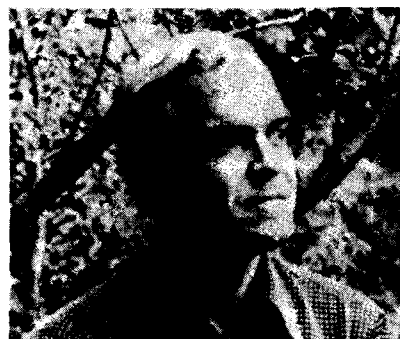


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TREE, STONE, WATER

1.

Walking the round limestone hills, above
the line where chill springs bubble
from stone clefts, we are aware
of the scarce trees. An elm, and
an elm, and at the edge of our sight
three more in a still dance. And no more,
however we may look. Why is it, after
a day's walking on this sweet grass, we see
the rooted trees still with us, an elm,
an elm, and three quiet elms far off,
poised for dancing?

2.

Smooth bole of the beech tree, gray
as elephants, but not wrinkled,
it hides with tidy scars the snags
of dropped branches, and holds
to the light its scatterings
of pointed tawny bud and fresh green leaves.
In Slindon Woods, in a cathedral
of high beeches, the perfect one,
standing without shake or bend,
is called "Beauty." Someone,
with neat respect, has carved her name
on the mellow bark; and she, indifferent
to the name, has nearly healed it away.

3.

A great tree stands in its wide
shade; generous, still trunk.
Its branches, stalks, leaves
hold air and light. I stand
at its broad foot and think
of the rooted strength,
large as a tree, and branched,
wrapped about earth and stone,
grasping the spinning world.

4.

Something happens to a dry wall: the earth
has to accept it. It must be built
with due reverence for the curves and usages
of the land. A field has its own passages,
its underground differing textures, can direct
the roots of trees beneath a wall, point
small creatures into crevices, measuring,
reporting. And if a wall is made wrongly,
arrogantly cuts across the field's
own passages and ways, then a slow,
uplifting, irresistible heave, lasting
many seasons, compounded of cracking frost
and warmth and all growing things, undoes
the wall, breaks its dry bonds, topples it.
Don't think to repair it. Look humbly
at the land, build where the wall belongs.
A field knows its boundaries.

5.

Gurgling and chortling
the smack of the tide
about the round
bluff of the cliff
sidles away
with a tumble
of little pebbles
and a wet buss
on the curves
of firm stone.
The plump limbs
of laved bluestone
wait for the work
of the turning moon.

6.

I stand at the land's edge, waiting
for what the tide will bring to me
and what it will take away.

—Leslie Norris



FEATHERS

A SHORT STORY
BY RAYMOND CARVER

THIS FRIEND OF MINE FROM WORK, BUD, HE ASKED Fran and me to supper. I didn't know his wife and he didn't know Fran. That made us even. But Bud and I were friends. And I knew there was a little baby at Bud's house. That baby must have been eight months old when he asked us to supper. Where'd those eight months go? Hell, where's the time gone since? I remember the day Bud came to work with a box of cigars. He handed them out in the lunchroom. They were drugstore cigars. Dutch Masters. But each cigar had a red sticker on it and a wrapper that said, "It's a Boy!" I didn't smoke cigars, but I took one anyway. "Take a couple," Bud said. He shook the box.

"I don't like cigars either. This is her idea." He was talking about his wife. Olla.

I'd never met Bud's wife, but once I'd heard her voice over the telephone. It was a Saturday afternoon, and I didn't have anything I wanted to do. So I called Bud to see if he wanted to do anything. This woman picked up the phone and said, "Hello." I blanked and couldn't remember her name. Bud's wife. Bud had said her name to me any number of times. But it went in one ear and out the other. "Hello!" the woman said again. I could hear a TV going. Then the woman said, "Who is this?" I heard a baby start up. "Bud!" the woman called. "What?" I heard Bud say. I

still couldn't remember her name. So I hung up. The next time I saw Bud at work I sure as hell didn't tell him I'd called. But I made a point of getting him to mention his wife's name. "Olla," he said. Olla, I said to myself. Olla.

"No big deal," Bud said. We were in the lunchroom drinking coffee. "Just the four of us. You and your missus, and me and Olla. Nothing fancy. Come around seven. She feeds the baby at six. She'll put him down after that, and then we'll eat. Our place isn't hard to find. But here's a map." He gave me a sheet of paper with all kinds of lines indicating major and minor roads, lanes and such, with arrows pointing to the four poles of the compass. A large X marked the location of his house. I said, "We're looking forward to it." But Fran wasn't too thrilled.

That evening, watching TV, I asked her if we should take anything to Bud's.

"Like what?" Fran said. "Did he say to bring something? How should I know? I don't have any idea." She shrugged and gave me this look. She'd heard me before on the subject of Bud. But she didn't know him and she wasn't interested in knowing him. "We could take a bottle of wine," she said. "But I don't care. Why don't you take some wine?" She shook her head. Her long hair swung back and forth over her shoulders. Why do we need other people? she seemed to be saying. We have each other. "Come here," I said. She moved a little closer so I could hug her. Fran's a big tall drink of water. She has this blonde hair that hangs down her back. I picked up some of her hair and sniffed it. I wound my hand in her hair. She let me hug her. I put my face right up in her hair and hugged her some more.

Sometimes when the hair gets in her way she has to pick it up and push it over her shoulder. She gets mad at it. "This hair," she says. "Nothing but trouble." Fran works in a creamery and has to wear her hair up when she goes to work. She has to wash it every night and take a brush to it when we're sitting in front of the TV. Now and then she threatens to cut it off. But I don't think she'd do that. She knows I like it too much. She knows I'm crazy about it. I tell her I fell in love with her because of her hair. I tell her I might stop loving her if she cut it. Sometimes I call her "Swede." She's not a Swede. But she could pass for a Swede. Those times together in the evening she'd brush her hair and we'd wish out loud for things we didn't have. We wished for a new car, that's one of the things we wished for. And we wished we could spend a couple of weeks in Canada. But one thing we didn't wish for was kids. The reason we didn't have kids was that we didn't want kids. Maybe sometime, we said to each other. But right then, we

were waiting. We thought we might keep on waiting. Some nights we went to a movie. Other nights we just stayed in and watched TV. Sometimes Fran baked things for me and we'd eat whatever it was all in a sitting.

"Maybe they don't drink wine," I said.

"Take some wine anyway," Fran said. "If they don't drink it, we'll drink it."

"White or red?" I said.

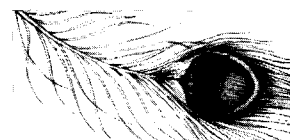
"We'll take something sweet," she said, not paying me any attention. "But I don't care if we take anything. This is your show. Let's not make a production out of it, or else I don't want to go. I can make a raspberry coffee ring. Or else some cinnamon rolls."

"They'll have dessert," I said. "You don't invite people to supper without fixing a dessert."

"They might have rice pudding. Or Jell-O! Something we don't like," she said. "I don't know anything about the woman. How do we know what she'll have? What if she gives us Jell-O?" She shook her head. I shrugged. But she was right. "Those old cigars he gave you," she said. "Take them. Then you and him can go off to the parlor after supper and smoke cigars and drink port wine, or whatever those people in movies drink."

"Okay, we'll just take ourselves," I said.

Fran said, "We'll take a loaf of my bread."



BUD AND OLLA LIVED TWENTY MILES OR SO FROM town. We'd lived in that town for three years but, damn it, Fran and I hadn't so much as taken a spin in the country. It felt good driving those winding little roads. It was early evening, nice and warm, and we saw pastures, rail fences, milk cows moving slowly toward old barns. We saw red-winged blackbirds on the fences, and pigeons circling around haylofts. There were gardens and such, wildflowers in bloom, and little houses set back from the road. I said, "I wish we had us a place out here." It was just an idle thought, another wish that wouldn't amount to anything. Fran didn't answer. She was busy looking at Bud's map. We came to the four-way stop he'd marked. We turned right like the map said and drove exactly three and three tenths miles. On the left side of the road I saw a field of corn, a mailbox, and a long graveled driveway. At the end of the driveway, back in some trees, stood a house with a front porch. There was a chimney on the house. But it was summer, so, of course, no smoke rose from the chimney. But I thought it was a pretty picture, and I said so to Fran.

"It's the sticks out here," she said.

I turned into the drive. Corn rose up on both sides of the drive. Corn stood higher than the car. I could hear gravel crunching under the tires. As we got up close to the house,

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we could see a garden with green things the size of baseballs hanging from the vines.

"What's that?" I said.

"How should I know?" she said. "Squash, maybe. I don't have a clue."

"Hey, Fran," I said. "Take it easy."

She didn't say anything. She drew in her lower lip and let it go. She turned off the radio as we got close to the house.

A baby's swing-set stood in the front yard and some toys lay on the porch. I pulled up in front and stopped the car. It was then we heard this awful squall. There was a baby in the house, right, but this cry was too loud for a baby.

"What's that sound?" Fran said.

Then something as big as a vulture flapped heavily down from one of the trees and landed just in front of the car. It shook itself. It turned its long neck toward the car, raised its head, and regarded us.

"God damn it," I said. I sat there with my hands on the wheel and stared at the thing.

"Can you believe it?" Fran said. "I never saw a real one before."

We both knew it was a peacock, sure, but we didn't say the word out loud. We just watched it. The bird turned its head up in the air and made this harsh cry again. It had fluffed itself out and looked about twice the size it'd been when it landed.

"God damn," I said again. We stayed where we were in the front seat.

The bird moved forward a little. Then it turned its head to the side and braced itself. It kept its bright, wild eye right on us. Its tail was raised, and it was like a big fan folding in and out. There was every color in the rainbow shining from that tail.

"My God," Fran said quietly. She moved her hand over to my knee.

"God damn," I said. There was nothing else to say.

The bird made this strange wailing sound once more. "*May-awe, may-awe!*" it went. If it'd been something I was hearing late at night and for the first time, I'd have thought it was somebody dying, or else something wild and dangerous.

The front door opened and Bud came out on the porch. He was buttoning his shirt. His hair was wet. It looked like he'd just come from the shower.

"Shut yourself up, Joey!" he said to the peacock. He clapped his hands at the bird, and the thing moved back a little. "That's enough now. That's right, shut up! You shut up, you old devil!" Bud came down the steps. He tucked in his shirt as he came over to the car. He was wearing what he always wore to work—blue jeans and a denim shirt. I had on my slacks and a short-sleeved sport shirt. My good loafers. When I saw what Bud was wearing, I didn't like it that I was dressed up.

"Glad you could make it," Bud said as he came over beside the car. "Come on inside."

"Hey, Bud," I said.

Fran and I got out of the car. The peacock stood off a little to one side, dodging its mean-looking head this way and that. We were careful to keep some distance between it and us.

"Any trouble finding the place?" Bud said to me. He hadn't looked at Fran. He was waiting to be introduced.

"Good directions," I said. "Hey, Bud, this is Fran. Fran, Bud. She's got the word on you, Bud."

He laughed and they shook hands. Fran was taller than Bud. Bud had to look up.

"He talks about you," Fran said. She took her hand back. "Bud this, Bud that. You're about the only person down there he talks about. I feel like I know you." She was keeping an eye on the peacock. It had moved over near the porch.

"This here's my friend," Bud said. "He *ought* to talk about me." Bud said this and then he grinned and gave me a little punch on the arm.

Fran went on holding her loaf of bread. She didn't know what to do with it. She gave it to Bud. "We brought you something."

Bud took the loaf. He turned it over and looked at it as if it was the first loaf of bread he'd ever seen. "This is real nice of you." He brought the loaf up to his face and sniffed it.

"Fran baked that bread," I told Bud.

Bud nodded. Then he said, "Let's go inside and meet the wife and mother."

He was talking about Olla, sure. Olla was the only mother around. Bud had told me his own mother was dead and that his dad had pulled out when Bud was a kid.

The peacock scuttled ahead of us, then hopped onto the porch when Bud opened the door. It was trying to get inside the house.

"Oh," said Fran as the peacock pressed itself against her leg.

"Joey, God damn it," Bud said. He thumped the bird on the top of its head. The peacock backed up on the porch and shook itself. The quills in its train rattled as it shook. Bud made as if to kick it, and the peacock backed up some more. Then Bud held the door for us. "She lets the god-damn thing in the house. Before long it'll be wanting to eat at the goddamn table and sleep in the goddamn bed."

Fran stopped just inside the door. She looked back at the cornfield. "You have a nice place," she said. Bud was still holding the door. "Don't they, Jack?"

"You bet," I said. I was surprised to hear her say it.

"A place like this is not all it's cracked up to be," Bud said, still holding the door. He made a threatening move toward the peacock. "Keeps you going. Never a dull minute." Then he said, "Step on inside, folks."

I said, "Hey, Bud, what's that growing there?"

"Them's tomatoes," Bud said.

"Some farmer I got," Fran said, and shook her head.

Bud laughed. We went inside. This plump little woman

with her hair done up in a bun was waiting for us in the living room. She had her hands rolled up in her apron. The cheeks of her face were bright red. I thought at first she might be out of breath, or else mad at something. She gave me the once-over, and then her eyes went to Fran. Not unfriendly, just looking. She stared at Fran and continued to blush.

Bud said, "Olla, this is Fran. And this is my friend, Jack. You know all about Jack. Folks, this is Olla." He handed Olla the bread.

"What's this?" she said. "Oh, it's homemade bread. Well, thanks. Sit down anywhere. Make yourselves at home. Bud, why don't you ask them what they'd like to drink. I've got something on the stove." Olla said that and went back into the kitchen with the bread.

"Have a seat," Bud said. Fran and I plunked ourselves down on the sofa. I reached for my cigarettes. Bud said, "Here's an ashtray." He picked up something heavy from the top of the TV. "Use this," he said, and he put the thing down on the coffee table in front of me. It was one of those glass ashtrays made to look like a swan. I lit up and dropped the match into the opening in the swan's back. I watched a little wisp of smoke drift out of the swan.

The color TV was going, so we looked at that for a minute. On the screen, stock cars were tearing around a track. The announcer talked in a grave voice. But it was as if he were holding back some excitement, too. "We're still waiting to have official confirmation," the announcer said.

"You want to watch this?" Bud said. He was still standing.

I said I didn't care. And I didn't. Fran shrugged. What difference could it make to her? she seemed to say. The day was shot anyway.

"There's only about twenty laps left," Bud said. "It's close now. There was a big pile-up earlier. Knocked out half-a-dozen cars. Some drivers got hurt. They haven't said yet how bad."

"Leave it on," I said. "Let's watch it."

"Maybe one of those damn cars will explode right in front of us," Fran said. "Or else maybe one'll run up into the grandstand and smash the guy selling the crummy hot dogs." She took a strand of hair between her fingers and kept her eyes fixed on the TV.

Bud looked at Fran to see if she was kidding. "That other business, that pile-up, was something. One thing led to another. Cars, parts of cars, people all over the place. Well, what can I get you? We have ale, and there's a bottle of Old Crow."

"What are you drinking?" I said to Bud.

"Ale," Bud said. "It's good and cold."

"I'll have ale," I said.

"I'll have some of that Old Crow and a little water," Fran said. "In a tall glass, please. With some ice. Thank you, Bud."

"Can do," Bud said. He threw another look at the TV and moved off to the kitchen.



FRAN NUDGED ME AND NODDED IN THE DIRECTION of the TV. "Look up on top," she whispered. "Do you see what I see?" I looked at where she was looking. There was a slender red vase into which somebody had stuck a few garden daisies. Next to the vase, on the doily, sat an old plaster-of-Paris cast of the most crooked, jaggedy teeth in the world. There were no lips to the awful-looking thing, and no jaw either, just these old plaster teeth packed into something that resembled thick yellow gums.

At that minute Olla came back with a can of mixed nuts and a bottle of root beer. She had her apron off now. She put the can of nuts onto the coffee table next to the swan. She said, "Help yourselves. Bud's getting your drinks." Olla's face came on red again as she said this. She sat down in an old cane rocking chair and set it in motion. She drank from her root beer and looked at the TV. Bud came back carrying a little wooden tray with Fran's glass of whiskey and water and my bottle of ale. He had a bottle of ale on the tray for himself.

"You want a glass?" he asked me.

I shook my head. He tapped me on the knee and turned to Fran.

She took her glass from Bud and said, "Thanks." Her eyes went to the teeth again. Bud saw where she was looking. The cars screamed around the track. I took the ale and gave my attention to the screen. The teeth were none of my business. "Them's what Olla's teeth looked like before she had her braces put on," Bud said to Fran. "I've got used to them. But I guess they look funny up there. For the life of me, I don't know why she keeps them around." He looked over at Olla. Then he looked at me and winked. He sat down in his La-Z-Boy and crossed one leg over the other. He drank from his ale and gazed at Olla.

Olla turned red once more. She was holding her bottle of root beer. She took a drink of it. Then she said, "They're to remind me how much I owe Bud."

"What was that?" Fran said. She was picking through the can of nuts, helping herself to the cashews. Fran stopped what she was doing and looked at Olla. "Sorry, but I missed that." Fran stared at the woman and waited for whatever thing it was she'd say next.

Olla's face turned red again. "I've got lots of things to be thankful for," she said. "That's one of the things I'm thankful for. I keep them around to remind me how much I owe Bud." She drank from her root beer. Then she lowered the bottle and said, "You've got pretty teeth, Fran. I noticed right away. But these teeth of mine, they came in crooked when I was a kid." With her fingernail she tapped a couple of her front teeth. She said, "My folks couldn't afford to fix teeth. These teeth of mine came in just any which way. My

first husband didn't care what I looked like. No, he didn't! He didn't care about anything except where his next drink was coming from. He had one friend only in this world, and that was his bottle." She shook her head. "Then Bud came along and got me out of that mess. After we were together, the first thing Bud said was, 'We're going to have them teeth fixed.' That mold was made shortly after Bud and I met, on the occasion of my second visit to the orthodontist. Right before the braces went on."

Olla's face stayed red. She looked at the picture on the screen. She drank from her root beer and didn't seem to have any more to say.

"That orthodontist must have been a whiz," Fran said. She looked back at the horror-show teeth on top of the TV.

"He was great," Olla said. She turned in her chair and said, "See?" She opened her mouth and showed us her teeth once more, not a bit shy now.

Bud had gone to the TV and picked up the teeth. He walked over to Olla and held them up against Olla's cheek. "Before and after," Bud said.

Olla reached up and took the mold from Bud. "You know something? That orthodontist wanted to keep this." She was holding it in her lap while she talked. "I said nothing doing. I pointed out to him they were *my* teeth. So he took pictures of the mold instead. He told me he was going to put the pictures in a magazine."

Bud said, "Imagine what kind of magazine that'd be. Not much call for that kind of publication, I don't think," he said, and we all laughed.

"After I got the braces off I kept putting my hand up to my mouth when I laughed. Like this," she said. "Sometimes I still do it. Habit. One day Bud said, 'You can stop doing that anytime, Olla. You don't have to hide teeth as pretty as that. You have nice teeth now.'" Olla looked over at Bud. Bud winked at her. She grinned and lowered her eyes.

Fran drank from her glass. I took some of my ale. I didn't know what to say to this. Neither did Fran. But I knew Fran would have plenty to say about it later.

I said, "Olla, I called here once. You answered the phone. But I hung up. I don't know why I hung up." I said that and then I sipped my ale. I didn't know why I'd brought it up now.

"I don't remember," Olla said. "When was that?"

"A while back."

"I don't remember," she said, and shook her head. She fingered the plaster teeth in her lap. She looked at the race and went back to rocking.

Fran turned her eyes to me. She drew her lip under. But she didn't say anything.

Bud said, "Well, what else is new?"

"Have some more nuts," Olla said. "Supper'll be ready in a little while."

There was a cry from a room in the back of the house.

"Not him," Olla said to Bud, and made a face.

"Old Junior boy," Bud said. He leaned back in his chair,

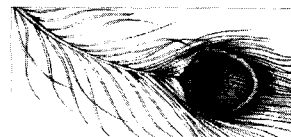
and we watched the rest of the race, three or four laps, no sound.

Once or twice we heard the baby again, little fretful cries coming from the room in the back of the house.

"I don't know," Olla said. She got up from her chair. "Everything's about ready for us to sit down. I just have to take up the gravy. But I'd better look in on him first. Why don't you folks go out and sit down at the table. I'll just be a minute."

"I'd like to see the baby," Fran said.

Olla was still holding the teeth. She went over and put them back on top of the TV. "It might upset him just now," she said. "He's not used to strangers. Wait and see if I can get him back to sleep. Then you can peek in. While he's asleep." She said this and then she went down the hall to a room, where she opened a door. She eased in and shut the door behind her. The baby stopped crying.



BUD KILLED THE PICTURE AND WE WENT IN TO SIT at the table. Bud and I talked about things at work. Fran listened. Now and then she even asked a question. But I could tell she was bored, and maybe feeling put out with Olla for not letting her see the baby. She looked around Olla's kitchen. She wrapped a strand of hair around her fingers and took inventory of Olla's things.

Olla came back into the kitchen and said, "I changed him and gave him his rubber duck. Maybe he'll let us eat now. But don't bet on it." She raised a lid and took a pan off the stove. She poured red gravy into a bowl and put the bowl on the table. She took lids off some other pots and looked to see that everything was ready. On the table were baked ham, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, lima beans, and corn on the cob. Green salad. Fran's loaf of bread was in a prominent place next to the ham.

"I forgot the napkins," Olla said. "You all get started. Who wants what to drink? Bud drinks milk with his meals."

"Milk's fine," I said.

"Water for me," Fran said. "But I can get it. I don't want you waiting on me. You have enough to do." She made as if to get up from her chair.

Olla said, "Please. You're company. Sit still. Let me get it." She was blushing again.

We sat with our hands in our laps and waited. I thought about those plaster teeth. Olla came back with napkins, big glasses of milk for Bud and me, and a glass of ice water for Fran. Fran said, "Thanks."

"You're welcome," Olla said. Then she seated herself. Bud cleared his throat. He bowed his head and said a few words of grace. He talked in a voice so low I could hardly make out the words. But I got the drift of things—he was

thanking a Higher Power for the food we were about to put away.

"Amen," Olla said, when he'd finished.

Bud passed me the platter of ham and helped himself to some mashed potatoes. We got down to it then. We didn't say much except now and then Bud or I would say, "This is real good ham." Or, "This sweet corn is the best corn I ever ate." "Well, try some more of these lima beans."

"This bread is what's special," Olla said. Her saying this caused Fran to soften up a little. "I'll have some more salad, please, Olla," Fran said.

"Have more of this," Bud would say as he passed me the platter of ham, or else the bowl of red gravy.

From time to time we heard the baby make its noise. Olla would turn her head to listen, then, satisfied it was just fussing, she would give her attention back to her food.

"That baby's out of sorts tonight," Olla said to Bud.

"I'd still like to see him," Fran said. "My sister has a little baby. But she and the baby live in Denver. When will I ever get to Denver? I have a niece I haven't even seen." Fran thought about this for a minute, and then she went back to eating.

Olla forked some ham into her mouth. "Let's hope he'll drop off to sleep," she said.

Bud said, "There's lots more of everything. Have some more ham and sweet potatoes, everybody."

"I can't eat another bite," Fran said. She laid her fork on her plate. "It's great, but I can't eat any more."

"Save room," Bud said. "Olla's made rhubarb pie."

Fran said, "I guess I could eat a little piece of that. When everybody else is ready."

"Me too," I said. But I said it to be polite. I'd hated rhubarb pie since I was thirteen years old and had got sick on it, eating it with strawberry ice cream.

We finished what was on our plates. Then we heard that damn peacock again. The thing was on the roof this time. We could hear it over our heads. It made a ticking sound as it walked back and forth on the shingles.

Bud shook his head. "Joey will knock it off in a minute. He'll get tired and turn in pretty soon," Bud said. "He sleeps in one of them trees."

The bird let go with its cry once more. "*May-awe!*" it went. Nobody said anything. What was there to say?

Then Olla said, "He wants in, Bud."

"Well, he can't come in," Bud said. "We got company, in case you hadn't noticed. These people don't want a god-damn old bird in the house. That dirty bird and your old pair of teeth! What're people going to think?" He shook his head. He laughed. We all laughed. Fran laughed along with the rest of us.

"He's not *dirty*, Bud," Olla said. "What's gotten into you? You like Joey. Since when did you start calling him dirty?"

"Since he shit on the rug that time," Bud said. "Pardon the French," he said to Fran. "But, I'll tell you, sometimes I could wring that old bird's neck for him. He's not even worth killing, is he, Olla? Sometimes, in the middle of the

night, he'll bring me up out of bed with that cry of his. He's not worth a nickel—right, Olla?"

Olla shook her head at Bud's nonsense. She moved a few lima beans around on her plate.

"How'd you get a peacock in the first place?" Fran wanted to know.

Olla looked up from her plate. She said, "I always dreamed of having me a peacock. Since I was a girl and found a picture of one in a magazine. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. I cut the picture out and put it over my bed. I kept that picture for the longest time. Then when Bud and I got this place, I saw my chance. I said, Bud, I want a peacock. Bud laughed at the idea."

"I finally asked around," Bud said. "I heard tell of an old boy who raised them over in the next county. Birds of paradise, he called them. We paid a hundred bucks for that bird of paradise," he said. He smacked his forehead. "God almighty, I got me a woman with expensive tastes." He grinned at Olla.

"Bud," Olla said, "you know that isn't true. Besides everything else, Joey's a good watchdog," she said to Fran. "We don't need a watchdog with Joey. He can hear just about anything."

"If times get tough, as they might, I'll put Joey in a pot," Bud said. "Feathers and all."

"Bud! That's not funny," Olla said. But she laughed and we got a good look at her teeth again.

The baby started up once more. It was serious crying this time. Olla put down her napkin and got up from the table.

Bud said, "If it's not one thing it's something else. Bring him on out here."

"I'm going to," Olla said, and went to the baby.

The peacock wailed again, and I could feel the hair stand out on the back of my neck. I looked at Fran. She picked up her napkin and then put it down. I looked toward the kitchen window. It was dark outside. The window was raised, and there was a screen in the window. I thought I heard the bird on the front porch.

Fran turned her eyes to look down the hall. She was watching for Olla and the baby.

In a minute, Olla came back with it. I looked at the baby and drew a breath. Olla sat down at the table with the baby. She held it up under its arms so it could stand on her lap, facing us. She looked at Fran and then at me. She wasn't blushing now. She waited for one of us to comment.

"Ah!" said Fran.

"What is it?" Olla said quickly.

"Nothing," Fran said. "I thought I saw something at the window. I thought I saw a bat."

"We don't have any bats around here," Olla said.

"Maybe it was a moth," Fran said. "It was something. Well," she said, "isn't that some baby?"

Bud was looking at the baby. Then he looked over at Fran. He tipped his chair onto its back legs and nodded.

He nodded again and said, "That's all right. Don't worry

any. We know he wouldn't win no beauty contests right now. He's no Clark Gable. But give him time. With any luck, you know, he'll grow up to look like his old man."

The baby stood in Olla's lap, looking around the table at us. Olla had moved her hands down to its middle so that the baby could rock back and forth on its fat legs. Bar none, it was the ugliest baby I'd ever seen. It was so ugly I couldn't say anything. No words would come out of my mouth. I don't mean it was diseased or disfigured. Nothing like that. It was just ugly. It had a big red face, popeyes, a broad forehead, and these big fat lips. It had no neck to speak of, and it had three or four fat chins. Its chins rolled right up under its ears, and its ears stuck out from its bald head. Fat hung over its wrists. Its arms and fingers were fat. Even calling it ugly does it credit.

The ugly baby made its noise and jumped up and down on its mother's lap. Then it stopped jumping. It leaned forward and tried to reach its fat hand into Olla's plate.

I've seen babies. When I was growing up my two sisters had a total of six babies. I was around babies a lot when I was a kid. I've seen babies in stores and so on. But this baby beat anything I ever saw. Fran stared at it too. She didn't know what to say either.

"He's a big fellow, isn't he?" I said finally.

Bud said, "He'll by God be turning out for football before long. He sure as hell won't go without meals around this house."

As if to make sure of this, Olla plunged her fork into some sweet potatoes and brought the fork up to the baby's mouth. "He's my baby, isn't he?" she said to the fat thing, ignoring us.

The baby leaned forward and opened up for the sweet potatoes. It reached for Olla's fork as she guided the sweet potatoes into its mouth, then clamped down. The baby chewed the stuff and rocked some more on Olla's lap. It was so popeyed it was like it was plugged into something.

Fran finally said something. She said, "He's some baby, Olla."

The baby's face screwed up. It began to fuss all over again.

"Let Joey in," Olla said to Bud.

Bud let the legs of his chair come down on the floor. "I think we should at least ask these people if they mind," Bud said.

Olla looked at Fran and then she looked at me. Her face had gone red again. The baby kept prancing in her lap, squirming to get down.

"We're friends here," I said. "Do whatever you want."

Bud said, "Maybe they don't want a big old bird like Joey in the house. Did you ever think of that, Olla?"

"Do you folks mind?" Olla said to us. "If Joey comes inside? Things got headed in the wrong direction with that bird tonight. The baby, too, I think. He's used to having Joey come in and fool around with him a little before his bedtime. Neither of them can settle down tonight."

"Don't ask us," Fran said. "I don't mind if he comes in.

I've never been up close to one before. But I don't mind." She looked at me. She wanted me to say something.

"Hell, no," I said. "Let him in." I picked up my glass and finished the milk.

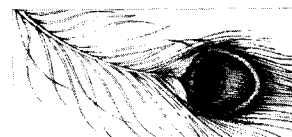
Bud got up from his chair. He went to the front door and opened it. He flicked on the yard lights.

"What's your baby's name?" Fran wanted to know.

"Harold," Olla said. She gave Harold some more sweet potatoes from her plate. "He's real smart. Sharp as a tack. Always knows what you're saying to him. Don't you, Harold? You wait until you get your own baby, Fran. You'll see."

Fran just looked at her. I heard the front door open and then close.

"He's smart, all right," Bud said as he came back into the kitchen. "He takes after Olla's dad. There was one smart old son-of-a-gun for you."



I LOOKED AROUND BEHIND BUD AND COULD SEE THAT peacock hanging back in the living room, turning its head this way and that, like you'd turn a hand mirror. It shook itself, and the sound was like a deck of cards being shuffled in the other room. It moved forward a step. Then another step.

"Can I hold the baby?" Fran said. She said it like it would be a favor if Olla would let her.

Olla handed the baby across the table to her.

Fran tried to get the baby settled in her lap. But the baby began to squirm and make its noises. "Harold," Fran said.

Olla watched Fran with the baby. She said, "When Harold's grandpa was sixteen years old he set out to read the encyclopedia from A to Z. He did it, too. He finished when he was twenty. Just before he met my mama."

"Where's he now?" I asked. "What's he do?" I wanted to know what had become of a man who'd set himself a goal like that.

"He's dead," Olla said. She was watching Fran, who by now had the baby down on its back and across her knees. Fran chuckled the baby under one of its chins. She started to talk baby talk to it.

"He worked in the woods," Bud said. "Loggers dropped a tree on him."

"Mama got some insurance money," Olla said. "But she spent that. Bud sends her something every month."

"Not much," Bud said. "Don't have much ourselves. But she's Olla's mother."

By this time the peacock had gathered its courage and was beginning to move slowly, with little swaying and jerking motions, into the kitchen. Its head was erect but at an angle, its red eyes fixed on us. Its crest, a little sprig of

feathers, stood a few inches over its head. Plumes rose from its tail. The bird stopped a few feet away from the table and looked us over.

"They don't call them birds of paradise for nothing," Bud said.

Fran didn't look up. She was giving all her attention to the baby. She'd begun to patty-cake with it, which pleased the baby somewhat. I mean, at least the thing had stopped fussing. She brought it up to her neck and whispered something into its ear. "Now," she said, "don't tell anyone what I said." The baby stared at her with its popeyes. Then it reached and got itself a baby handful of Fran's blonde hair. The peacock stepped closer to the table. None of us said anything. We just sat still. Baby Harold saw the bird. It let go of Fran's hair and stood up on her lap. It pointed its fat fingers at the bird. It jumped up and down and made noises.

The peacock walked quickly around the table and went for the baby. It ran its long neck across the baby's legs. It pushed its beak in under the baby's pajama top and shook its stiff head back and forth. The baby laughed and kicked its feet. Scooting onto its back, the baby worked its way over Fran's knees and down onto the floor. The peacock kept pushing against the baby, as if it were a game they were playing. Fran held the baby against her legs while the baby strained forward.

"I just don't believe this," she said.

"That peacock is crazy, that's what," Bud said. "Damn bird doesn't know it's a bird, that's its major trouble."

Olla grinned and showed her teeth again. She looked over at Bud. Bud pushed his chair away from the table and nodded.

It was an ugly baby. But, for all I know, I guess it didn't matter that much to Bud and Olla. Or if it did, maybe they simply thought, So okay if it's ugly. It's our baby. And this is just a stage. Pretty soon there'll be another stage. There is this stage and then there is the next stage. Things will be okay in the long run, once all the stages have been gone through. They might have thought something like that.

Bud picked the baby up and swung him over his head until Harold shrieked. The peacock ruffled its feathers and watched.

Fran shook her head again. She smoothed out her dress where the baby had been. Olla had picked up her fork and was working at some lima beans on her plate.

Bud shifted the baby onto his hip and said, "There's pie and coffee yet."

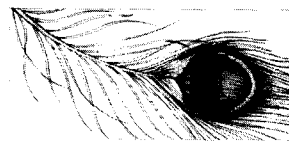
That evening at Bud and Olla's was special. I knew it was special. That evening I felt good about almost everything in my life. I couldn't wait to be alone with Fran to talk to her about what I was feeling. I made a wish that evening. Sitting there at the table, I closed my eyes for a minute and thought hard. What I wished for was that I'd never forget or otherwise let go of that evening. That's one wish of mine that came true. And it was bad luck for me that it did. But, of course, I couldn't know that then.

"What are you thinking about, Jack?" Bud said to me.

"I'm just thinking," I said. I grinned at him.

"A penny," Olla said.

I just grinned some more and shook my head.



AFTER WE GOT HOME FROM BUD AND OLLA'S THAT night, and we were under the covers, Fran said, "Honey, fill me up with your seed!" When she said that, I heard her all the way down to my toes, and I hollered and let go.

Later, after things had changed for us, and the kid had come along, all of that, Fran would look back on that evening at Bud's place as the beginning of the change. But she's wrong. The change came later, and when it came it was like something that happened to other people, not something that could have happened to us.

"God damn those people and their ugly baby," Fran will say, for no apparent reason, while we're watching TV late at night. "And that smelly bird," she'll say. "Christ, who needs it!" Fran will say. She says this kind of stuff a lot, even though she hasn't seen Bud and Olla since that evening.

Fran doesn't work at the creamery anymore, and she cut her hair a long time ago. She's gotten fat on me. We don't talk about it. What's to say?

I still see Bud at the plant. We work together and we eat our lunch together. If I ask, he tells me about Olla and Harold. Joey's out of the picture. He flew into his tree one night and that was it for him. He didn't come down. Old age, maybe, Bud says. Then the owls took over. He shrugs. He eats his sandwich and says Harold's going to be a linebacker someday. "You ought to see that kid," Bud says. I nod. We're still friends. That hasn't changed any. But I've gotten careful with what I say to him. And I know he feels that and wishes it could be different. I wish it was different too.

Once in a blue moon he asks about my family. When he does, I tell him everybody's fine. "Everybody's fine," I say. I close the lunch pail and take out my cigarettes. Bud nods and sips his coffee. The truth is, my kid has a conniving streak in him. But I don't talk about it. Not even with his mother. Especially her. She and I talk less and less as it is. Mostly it's just the TV. But I remember that night. I recall the way the peacock picked up its gray feet and inched around the table. And then my friend and his wife saying goodnight to us on the porch. Olla giving Fran some peacock feathers to take home. I remember all of us shaking hands, hugging each other, saying things. In the car, Fran sat close to me as we drove away. She kept her hand on my leg. We drove home like that from my friend's house, back to our house. □

*Guilt and caution have often led the Western press
to explain away the continent's failures*

MISUNDERSTANDING AFRICA

BY XAN SMILEY

HEAVY SELF-CENSORSHIP IS A STANDARD FEATURE of reporting by Western journalists everywhere in the Third World, but nowhere is it more rigorously in force than in black Africa. For one thing, a reporter has to be as kind to the country he's writing about as possible, if he is to have any hope of returning. (Exercising such caution is known in the journalist's trade as "being a good operator"—one of the highest terms of praise.) A more subtle goad to mind what one says than any visa restriction is a reporter's own guilt. If he wants to show—as most Western whites do—that he sympathizes with the blacks whom his ancestors have oppressed, then he may fudge so much that he becomes a liar. For example, examining the "underlying causes" of the continent's malaise, a reporter will assign them to anything or anybody except the Africans themselves, and he will blame the West for having "warped the African mind"—that is, for having destroyed Africa's traditional cultures without offering anything tangible in return. Or he will look the other way, and write admiringly about literacy schemes, health projects, and dams rather than about "rehabilitation camps," abandoned hospitals, and schools decaying from neglect. Above all, if he is to survive in respectable journalistic circles, he must paint over the rank incompetence, cruelty, and corruption of the new elites—be they right-wing or left-wing—and ignore the amorality and inertia among the ordinary people.

The distortions go unchallenged, because Africa, vast as it is, no longer seems of great importance to the rest of the world. Journalists know that its tale of woe has become repetitive; that the great global power game will not be played out there; that the grand social and economic experiments of post-independence Africa have lost their charm; in short, that Africa is a fad that has passed. "Not on the front burner now," say hard-nosed news editors. "Well, South Africa." Long breath. "That's a bit different, of course."

In the heady days just after independence, Africa beckoned. The natural wealth and beauty, then as now, were

enormous. How easy to tap them! A few crash programs to combat illiteracy and disease; the transformation of the cream of the new generation into black white men at universities in the U.S., Britain, and France; the education of the masses; and presto! Strategically, foreigners argued, the continent was ripe for investment. Outsiders wanted to use African ports, build airfields, and make friends. Chou En-lai said that Africa was ready for revolution, while Che Guevara put his own theories into practice in the forests of eastern Zaire (then still the Congo). Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Senghor, Kenneth Kaunda, and Julius Nyerere all came up with smart new names for ideas that had been around for centuries; they talked glowingly of—respectively—Pan-Africanism, Negritude, Humanism, and Ujamaa (or Familyhood). In Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta cried "Harambee"—roughly speaking, "Pull together." And in Zaire, President Mobutu was taken seriously by both Africans and Europeans for a while, when he coined "Mobutisme," which means (as any chuckling taxi driver in Kinshasa will tell you) "the marriage between Mobutu and the people." The essence of the new ideal—at the most fashionable and therefore fuzziest end of the spectrum—was to hark back to an indigenous, specifically African, state of grace. Because socialism and capitalism sounded somewhat European, other names were found: "communism," and "African socialism," for example. An ideal of sharing, without the connotations of regimentation or repression, was conjured up. The good will of the West was unstinting: the jungle and the bush did seem a fine laboratory for new ideas, and the guilt of former colonizers could undergo a bit of expiation in the African sun.

Almost nowhere has it worked. The guilt is still there, and the guilty ones—or rather we, their descendants—are soured rather than satisfied. The Africans are a little less innocent and much less agreeable. The good will trickles away. Today, two of the most prosperous countries in Africa are still colonies, as far as their economies are concerned. The Ivory Coast, for one, is officially independent, but its wealth is managed by 60,000 Frenchmen, who have put the country's economy at the top of the African league, judged by every possible yardstick of productivity and development. Similarly, Zimbabwe enjoys the legacy of Ian Smith's white Rhodesia. Although the prime minister, Robert Mugabe, is a professed Marxist, he is reluctant to

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dismantle the white machine in view of 1980's 13 percent increase in gross national product, the highest in Africa. (It was still a most respectable 8 percent in 1981.) The handful of other economies in Africa that tick over (like Nigeria's, which is fueled by the fluke of oil finds) have some expensive natural resource to exploit. Kenya, only meagerly blessed in resources, and politically and economically again under strain, has made some brave strides from a thin base. Botswana has been aided by diamonds more or less controlled by a South African firm; Cameroon, by oil and a shrewd but repressive dictatorship. Gabon, a harshly ruled former French colony, is another oil producer, which has successfully followed an International Monetary Fund program. But most countries have experienced a steady slide toward penury, and the slide has been most spectacular among those, such as Ghana and Tanzania, whose futures once seemed most exciting.

A crude and probably flattering guess is that since independence, perhaps a dozen of the fifty members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) have marginally progressed: that is to say, the average citizen of these countries enjoys a better all-round living now than before the colonial shackles were shed; more people are educated; health services have expanded. Maybe a third of the OAU countries are marking time. The remainder have actually

gone backward. The pattern of political misery has usually conformed to the economy. Barely a dozen states allow their citizens any real measure of individual freedom or dissent. The political prisons are fuller than at any time during the colonial era. Dawn has been followed by night.

WHEN I FIRST WENT OUT TO KENYA FROM ENGLAND fifteen years ago (my maternal grandparents had settled there in 1919, but I was brought up entirely in Europe, and so had never known them), I was eager to rebut the evil-minded prejudices and contemptuous prophecies of the hairy-kneed relics of settlerdom. Nothing irritated me more than the smug assertion that Africa would "revert to bush," or that the "ordinary decent bloody Af will soon be sorry that we've gone." Well, most of the Africans still are not sorry. But lately, old men, and even the not-so-old, throughout Africa, have been bearding me with requests for "the Queen to come back." And in many places I have seen once-neat houses falling into ruin, roads breaking up, farms reverting to patches of subsistence, and the bush physically reclaiming slices of Africa that had briefly been tamed by men—white men, one recalls with embarrassment, or rather, to be more precise, white men bossing black men about.

One of the great Western myths is that it is primarily the lack of aid and sympathy from the West (or North, as we must now learn to call ourselves, thanks to the strictures of Willy Brandt's cogent report) that has caused the rot. Up to a point, Brandt's book, *North-South: A Program for Survival*, was right. Money, aid, training, and more equitable marketing systems to correct the imbalance between rich countries and poor countries—all these are needed. Yet it is mainly the fault of the Africans themselves that African economies have collapsed, just as it is the triumph of the Japanese that their economy has flourished, even though the country is totally lacking in mineral resources and was bankrupted by World War II.

Look at Zaire, once the Belgian Congo, a country more handsomely endowed than most in the world. Formerly you could drive from any point in that vast state to any other within a couple of days, river crossings included. Now only three out of nine regions are accessible to the capital, Kinshasa, by ordinary vehicle. Bridges have collapsed, and it is unlikely that they will be repaired. Roads have been washed away, overtaken by rain and jungle. The pothole, one of the symbols of modern Africa, decorates every road, uncontested. The national airline, Air Zaire, known to jocular locals as Air Jamais or Air ZigZag, is barely functional. President Mobutu periodically "borrows" one of the airline's Boeings to drop in on his home village of Gbadolite, which is in the heart of nowhere but is replete with an international-class jet runway and a mausoleum built for his late wife out of marble transported from France at several million dollars' cost.

The most reliable mode of transport into the interior is, as in Conrad's day, the river steamer, now frequently raided by pirates (often unpaid soldiers). To go from the capital to the provincial center of Kisangani (once Stanleyville), for instance, takes six days upstream, five days down. Regional commissioners—in colonial terminology, governors—are like semi-independent chieftains or warlords, exacting taxes, sometimes in the shape of ivory tusks or smuggled diamonds; dispensing patronage and rough justice according to their own inclinations; and thereafter paying mild allegiance to the shrewd paramount chief, the gangster figure of Mobutu, far away in Kinshasa or in even more remote Gbadolite. An eccentric Frenchman traveling downstream by raft from the distant headwaters of the Zaire River was recently greeted by joyful villagers as the harbinger of a returning Belgian administration.

Zaire, it is true, is a far-gone case. But it is by no means alone. When Ghana gained its independence, in 1957, it had the second highest per capita income in Africa, and the best-educated black middle class. But by the time the maverick cult figure Kwame Nkrumah was toppled, nine years later, the opposition leadership had been jailed and the country bankrupted. Five coups and three executed heads of state later, a frail democracy was resuscitated in 1980, but on New Year's Eve, 1981, Flight Lieutenant Jerry

Rawlings, another cult figure, patriotic in a naive way, again took power by the barrel of a gun. Whatever he does, the economy and moral well-being of Ghana will take a generation to recover. Today the minimum urban hourly wage barely suffices to buy half a loaf of bread or a bottle of beer.

The list of African catastrophes is long, and the most compelling cases are those where the future once seemed most brilliantly assured. Guinea, for instance, under Sékou Touré, proudly severed the French link and forged instead a Russian one (and gave honorary citizenship to Stokely Carmichael). In the years since, it has reduced itself almost irretrievably to bankruptcy. The Russians have been flung out now and the French asked back, and the repression has relaxed a little, but since independence seventy cabinet ministers have been murdered or thrown into jail. When a body politic is thus strangled, the economy invariably languishes. Recovery becomes a distant mirage.

WHY HAS AFRICA, ON ITS OWN, FAILED? JULIUS Nyerere and other charismatic African leaders have a host of explanations, and they are all valid, as far as they go. Drought, disease, illiteracy, and the brutal heritage of years of neglect and underdevelopment under colonialism do encumber many countries. More aid would help, to be sure, though sometimes aid makes matters worse, by inhibiting the people's resourcefulness. The fluctuations of international markets cruelly hit many countries that are dependent on the prices of raw materials for export: for example, when the world copper price drops by half, as it did in 1975, a country like Zambia, which is almost entirely dependent on copper production, is left in acute distress. The oil price eats huge holes in many African budgets before anything much can be disbursed for real development. But, all this granted, the overwhelming reason for Africa's grim failure is that the continent is very badly governed by the Africans.

The first large obstacle to African progress is the gross artificiality of the states, whose borders were crudely decided by colonial map-makers and hurriedly confirmed after independence by tiny black elites. There is hardly a country in Africa whose population is homogeneous. Totally disparate peoples, tribes with less in common than, say, Poles and Spaniards, have been thrown together in arbitrary political entities and told to choose governments. The lack of cultural and linguistic affinity within the new countries has prevented any real national consensus from emerging in most of them. In other words, tribalism is incorrigibly stronger than a spurious nationalism based on recently drawn colonial boundaries, and remains by far the most important power in politics throughout the continent.

There have been quite a number of instances where, in the first anti-colonial glow of independence, a leader has

been so attractive that nationals across the tribal spectrum have supported him; Nkrumah, of Ghana, to give him his due, was one such. Or where there is a plethora of tribes, as in Tanzania, a single outstanding figure has been able to gain wide acceptance. But in practically every African country tribal loyalties have predominated and, to the chagrin of the Marxists, they have proved far more resilient than class loyalties. In Nigeria, with an enormous, growing, and often ill-treated urban proletariat, there is no left-wing workers' party of any substance: the odds are that a poor Yoruba will still vote for a rich Yoruba; a poor Hausa for a rich one; a poor Ibo for a rich one.

Again and again, I have been told by authorities in African countries that such-and-such an ancient tribal leader is a "busted flush," that "only the old still follow him," and so on. But they bob back time and again: the Yoruba vote for the aging Awolowo; the Kenyan Luo will not abandon Oginga Odinga; the Lunda secessionists in Shaba (formerly Katanga), Zaire's copper province, will back any strong leader who follows in the footsteps of Moise Tshombe, even though in the mythology of modern Africa he was a traitor. (However the ideology may be dressed up, whether the guns come from Angola via the Soviet Union or, as occurred twenty years ago, through Belgian mining interests and from white South Africa and Rhodesia, Shaba treasures the memory of Tshombe.)

Furthermore, it can be comfortably promised that where one ethnic group is the largest and most sophisticated in the land, the country will be ungovernable without that group's consent. In Kenya, President Daniel arap Moi, himself from a tiny group, has to have the backing of the Kikuyu if he is to rule with any efficiency. Similarly, Uganda will never attain stability until the Baganda—the key tribal group—are at the heart of government, an utter impossibility so long as their adversary Milton Obote rules. Kaunda cannot now govern Zambia effectively because he has alienated the main Zambian tribe, the Bemba. In Angola, Dr. Jonas Savimbi's group, the Ovimbundu, is the largest in the country at 35 to 40 percent of the population, and I assume there will never be peace and prosperity there until they are accommodated.

Tribal politics means that high positions are meted out largely on the basis of tribal balance. This undermines the people's faith in being able to succeed on merit alone. The prevailing expectation is that the tribal representatives will amass fortunes in government, out of which they will reward their clansmen's loyalty. In a continent where the gap between the rich and the poor is a mighty abyss, this system does have the advantage of encouraging a trickle-down—circuitous, perhaps—of wealth. For instance, when Tom Mboya, the Kenyan trade-unionist statesman, was assassinated (probably by members of a rival tribe who feared his popularity), he was paying for the education of 300 children.

It can be argued that patronage by individuals (in an ungenerous mood, one might add bribery, nepotism, and

corruption) is less deadening than patronage by the state. Often, in the face of white South African accusations that "all of Africa north of the Zambesi is corrupt," I have felt obliged to defend the need for patronage, as a mechanism for spreading wealth while serving also to mediate among competing tribes and power factions. One can go on to draw analogies between an arguably "creative patronage" in Africa and the patronage that prevailed in corrupt but progressive Georgian England. Many African struggles mirror European history: the growth of the larger nation-states, dynastic wars, tribal schisms presented as religious ones (in Africa, for "religion" read "ideology"). There are many leading African figures who, while forced to engage in patronage in order to survive, are serving the common good at the same time that they are enriching themselves.

That has been so in many societies. And yet, in the end, good can never prevail where corruption is institutionalized, even though a majority of the people may appear to accept it. A professional middle class can never operate efficiently when decisions are made according to graft. Parallels again: it was only in the early part of the last century that corruption ceased to be a way of life in Britain (not that it has ceased altogether now, but it has ceased to be accepted as normal). The reason, it seems, is that the middle class—the technocrats, the professional civil servants—was no longer willing to let the old landed interests rule and become prosperous at the expense of the rest, and the middle class had become economically and thence politically important enough to make itself felt. Finally, enough politicians of the "new" and often more middle-class kind decided that peculation was a sin and that they should lead by example: Sir Robert Peel, for instance, a rather grimly sober figure, refused to take bribes, and his colleagues were shamed into following suit. Likewise in Africa, it is only this mixture of example and middle-class muscle that can curb the politicians' excesses: the muscle is growing, but there is no sign whatever of the political example. Nigeria's President Shagari has promised to set a new, austere standard of conduct, but it has become clear that the old, northern Nigerian elite upon whom he must rely is unwilling to imitate him.

THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM HAS BEEN ADOPTED throughout Africa to counter the divisive tendencies exacerbated by tribalism. Indeed, there is a very good case for a single-party system. Multi-party politics in Africa has invariably deteriorated into a competition between tribal blocs or alliances; in Nigeria this is still the case, despite the constitution's dexterous checks and balances, designed to prevent tribal voting patterns entirely. In addition, the concept of a loyal opposition, presupposing some basic national consensus usually absent in Africa, is considered by most ordinary Africans to be crazy: neither that consensus nor any form of liberal indi-



vidualist tradition exists. People's attitudes are fiercely determined by ties of family and clan. At its gentlest, politics means that a nascent opposition will be absorbed by traditional African palaver into the single party; if not, it is silenced, perhaps violently. The secret ballot thus becomes unnecessary. When, last year, I discussed with a group of Zimbabwean secondary-school teachers the danger that people who hold minority views would be afraid to vote, the teachers proved to be unanimously hostile to the secret ballot, for the simple reason that it is "un-African."

So rigid control—which easily slides into repression and authoritarianism—is the order of the day, and the leadership, lacking any stimulating competition from within, inevitably becomes fossilized. This process has occurred in almost every single-party state in Africa. There is a small, brave band of sub-Saharan countries—Senegal, Gambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Botswana, Mauritius—that have allowed their people a measure of pluralist political choice. Uganda still allows an opposition party but the fear and chaos there are such that oppositionists are afraid to take advantage of the law. Leaders such as Kenneth Kaunda, of Zambia, and Julius Nyerere, of Tanzania, men whose basic ideals are laudable and whose grandiose prospectuses for the African future have been taken in earnest by the West,

have destroyed all vigorous, constructive political discussion, because they feared it.

A change that may gradually soften the grimness of the one-party system is the greater willingness of some African leaders—President Shagari, of Nigeria, for example—to allow national power to be devolved from the central executive to the periphery, especially to give a longer leash to tribal impulses. The problem is how to give regional interests freedom to speak for themselves without letting them demand wholesale secession. Federalism, as countless old British administrators will tell you, "never works." All the same, the OAU has been unduly inflexible for fear that a flood of secessionist feeling would be released if one secessionist movement—the one in Eritrea, for example, where the majority of the people undoubtedly desire secession from Ethiopia—were given official Pan-African blessings.

In general, nonetheless, I strongly believe that the greater the redrawing of the artificial colonial boundaries of Africa, the better. Yes, a thousand disturbing new nationalisms could be provoked across the continent. But why not, when most of the fifty OAU nations show no sign of emerging into real entities? Somalis will never wish to be part of Kenya or Ethiopia; why should they? Redraw the map instead. Let Chad break up into separate parts.

Set Shaba free from Zaire. Let the Western Sahara have its patch of desert and phosphate. I never meet a Biafran, even today, after all the suffering of the Nigerian civil war, who does not look back on the Biafran adventure with pride. At a dinner in Lagos some months ago, where the guests were mainly Ibo (i.e., Biafran), not one person was willing to say that the secessionist idea had been a mistake, despite the loss of a million lives.

When opposition views or discontent can find no outlet, the temptation is for soldiers, often up-jumped, thuggish sergeant-majors from the colonial era, to intervene: nearly half of the OAU's member states are led by men whose experience and power arose from the army. The general moribundity of African political systems is starkly illustrated by the fact that until recently, Africa was the only continent where not a single political leader had ever been peacefully voted out of office. (In June, the government of Mauritius, an OAU member although it is an island far out in the Indian Ocean with a population of predominantly Indian descent, was dismissed in a free general election.) A few military regimes—in Nigeria in 1979, in Ghana until the first of this year, and briefly in the Upper Volta, whose experiment ended abruptly in a coup this year—have been generous enough to give power back to civilians. One great leader, the poet-president Léopold Senghor, of Senegal, stepped down voluntarily to make way for his own protégé—an astonishing action in black African history. But this handful is all, which is a wretched record.

The stifling of dissent in black Africa militates against effective government: the leader, all too often sheltered within a circle of sycophants, loses touch with his people. There is virtually no domestic press in Africa worthy of the name. Some exceptions can be made: Hilary Ngwen's *Weekly Review* in Kenya and in Senegal an array of polemical but legal broadsheets—one pro-Soviet, one Maoist, one pro-Albanian (yes), one Islamic-fundamentalist. Also in Senegal there is the boisterously irreverent *Politicien*, which is modeled on the *Canard Enchaîné*, of Paris, and is the only legal satirical paper in Africa. Nigeria has a dynamic free press, but lacks a single paper with even a modicum of objectivity. Despite harassment and the steady erosion of its liberties, South Africa's press is still, along with Nigeria's, the freest in Africa. Elsewhere on the continent, politicians can expect their activities to be glorified rather than interpreted by native journalists, and most begin to believe the publicity, though most of them are also sensible enough to have numbered bank accounts in Zurich, just in case the unthinkable should happen.

But fantasy is better than reality. The ascent into deification, the endless harping on the rhetoric of liberation, the show of symbols of power, the ceaseless renaming of streets and towns in order to "reflect the new reality"—they become the very substance of the ruler's new world. The motorcade of Mercedes-Benz, the wailing sirens, the glossy, glass-encased airports, the posters extolling

the virtues of the leader, the honorific titles: by these means, the president becomes the "guide," or "the savior." Even the puritanical Nyerere has become "Mwalimu" (the Teacher); one less modest, such as Amin, becomes Conqueror of the British Empire, or Emperor, like Sergeant Bokassa, the now-exiled Central African ruler who ordered the murder of a hundred schoolchildren who had been demonstrating against him. And somehow, as the dream of national or pan-African glory evaporates, these tinselly trappings of independence become a substitute for material advance. The speeches grow ever longer, as though it were the length rather than the content that now matters to the masses.

Mobutu's ornate stick, with carved bird's head at the top, woven in ebony with snakes and images of women with blank faces and meaningfully distended bellies, becomes a kind of wand of potency. The late Jomo Kenyatta's omnipresent fly whisk had the same effect. In the absence of tangible European-style wealth, in the form of (for example) a healthy balance of payments, the game of "authenticity"—the search for a primal, idealized African condition that is supposed to have prevailed before the rape of the black mother by the white man—has overtaken the half-baked expectations that were ritually mouthed at independence. Instead, the glory of the leader, the sanctity of the "committees of national salvation," and so forth, have become all. The people, often in the absence of mundane benefits for themselves, are expected to bask in the reflected glory of their new king-leaders. No one officially minded when young Kenyans wore T-shirts with Kenyatta's portrait emblazoned across the chest; but when button-up shirts with the same picture began to be sold, they were banned, because when one unbuttoned the shirt, one was "splitting *mzee's* head open." The image, the word, is paramount. Thus the Congo improves by becoming Zaire.

THESE ARE A STRANGE DUALITY IN AFRICAN THINKING. The fruits of the West are desirable and must be acquired, but the ways of the West—"the colonization of the mind"—and in particular the Western methods of acquisition, must be rejected. Material glitter is cherished, but the boring, methodical rigor with which nations are built, and the dreary civic obligations that give cement to political decisions, are somehow to be dispensed with. In theory, rural health programs are to be embarked upon, but in practice, you hardly ever find a young black doctor willing to tolerate a stint in the bush, away from the bright lights of the big town: the point of the long grind of training is to get *out* of the bush. Similarly, the urge to own land is powerful throughout Africa, but most educated Africans consider it beneath them to undertake commercial farming. The population of the continent is rising at a furious rate: an increase of almost 4 percent of the population per year in some countries. Ministers make rousing

speeches in favor of UNESCO and other agencies in their attempts to encourage family planning, but when it comes to limiting their own families, the new elites reject birth control as un-African—an imperialist plot to keep black numbers down. Technocrats want industrialization and higher productivity, but punctuality, it still seems, is regarded as a bit of a white man's joke. A visiting IMF dignitary or Western diplomat would never arrange a sit-down dinner in Africa: no guest can be relied upon to turn up.

Training? Money from outside? A large-scale redistribution of wealth from North to South? Yes, of course that would help. But nothing fundamental in Africa will change until there is a revolution in the attitude of the middle class and then, by optimistic extension, in the attitude of the apathetic masses. Nigeria, awash with oil, will never function as an equitable or stable society so long as the civil servants are "not on seat" when you go round to visit them (telephones usually are not worth trying) because they are running private businesses on the side. Most senior Nigerian soldiers are likewise engaged in private business a good deal of the time.

It is not that there is a lack of talent. Many able technocrats despise the old-style, tub-thumping politicians who lay down the law. Yet few civil services are apolitical. So why bother to stand apart as a professional, when you can benefit yourself and your family by swimming along with the flotsam and jetsam of corruption and patronage?

Angry revolutions have from time to time spoiled the fun, but by and large the rural and urban masses are amaz-

ingly stoical in the face of the flaunted privilege and fortunes of the new elites. It is simply the prerogative of the big man to be fat, to throw weight around. So long as the big man is generous and provides beer for the boys—(and many of them are remarkably profligate)—the *wananchi*—the people of the soil, the small fry—seem to accept their lot. Above all, they seem to acknowledge that if the roles were reversed, they would behave no differently.

A well-known Kenyan politician sold off thousands of dollars of food aid during a year of famine. The people knew it. But he had suffered during the liberation struggle and he was—still is—a mesmerizing demagogue. Though they know he is a crook, the people still elect him by an overwhelming majority. Style counts for much. The masses loved the promises of land and riches that the Kenyan populist parliamentarian J. M. Kariuki liked to make them—so much so that the Kenyatta elite were obliged to assassinate him. But in earlier days, when "JM" was assistant minister for tourism in charge of the anti-poaching drive and Mrs. Kariuki's car was found to contain a pile of illicit elephant tusks, no one turned a hair. There is no conflict between campaigning for the underprivileged on the one hand and stealing a bit of state property on the other. The only people you truly trust are your family, your clan, and maybe your tribal leaders, but nobody else. In Nigeria you "play politics": to an outsider, the rhetoric of idealism is embarrassing in its effusion. People seem to mean it as it flows off the tongue, but no one really believes it. Politics is generally a game of power and wealth, but in Africa the play is more brazen.

Demoralization breeds self-hatred. The years of freedom have mounted up, mocking the plausibility of the excuses for failure. You can be poor and proud if your oppression is self-evident and your situation not of your own making. But a generation has now passed since independence. Although the mechanisms for controlling international markets and for lending cash remain firmly in the hands of the West, Africans know deep down that they themselves must break the cycle of dependence and inferiority. The Japanese did it. So, in theory, must they. That is what Nyerere said, and he was right, and for a while he brilliantly inspired people with the promise of self-reliance. If all his cabinet had been of his own quality, perhaps he could have succeeded. Instead, in Tanzania and even more acutely in the rest of Africa, post-colonial freedom has brought an increase in self-doubt.

One of the saddest, most self-demeaning developments in black Africa is that the ordinary African, seeing the poor results of a generation of independence, is more convinced than ever of an imaginary superiority of the white man. The wheel has turned so far that I know of many black Africans who prefer to hire whites, even if their qualifications are poor, as managers of farms, hotels, and all sorts of enterprises requiring administrative skill, simply because they are white. Ask an African which airline he would rather travel on if he values his safety: the odds are,



IN THE CEMETERY

Above the fence-flowers, like a bloody thumb,
A hummingbird is throbbing . . . Some
Petals take motion now from the beaten wings
In hardly observable obscure quiverings.
And the mother stands there, but so still her clothing
Seems to have settled into stone, nothing
To animate her face now, nothing to see there,
Only the monotonous sculptures of the weather.
She stands that way for a long time while the sky
Ponders her with its great Medusa-eye;
Or in the boy's memory she does.

And then a
Fat blacksnake, lazy with long sunning, glides
Down from its slab, and through the thick grass, and hides
Somewhere among the purpling wild verbena.

— Donald Justice

he would prefer not to travel on an African line. If they can pay the price, people will go to a white doctor; schoolchildren will trudge miles every day to study under a white teacher. And as the rhetoric of black power blows more clamorous, it seems that the Africans are stuck more firmly than ever in the prison of low self-esteem.

I frequently wonder at the lack of bitterness Africans show toward their recent European masters. In Zimbabwe, for example, it seems extraordinary that so little nationalist venom is vented upon Ian Smith. But his old adversaries appear to think: "He's a tribal chieftain. Of course we don't much like his white tribe, and they don't like us. But he did only what seemed to be best for his bunch." Indeed, Smith's style and nerve are admired more than the piety of many white friends of black Africa. Conversely, again and again I sense that liberal well-wishers are despised: What, it is asked, is their *real* game; and why, by the way, are liberal South Africans—the Oppenheimers, for instance—often the richest of the lot? Few Africans seem to believe that such people can cherish disinterested humanitarian motives alongside the wish for their own survival, that self-interest can be coupled with a genuine, enlightened liberalism. Given this perspective, Tiny Rowland, head of the vast, Africa-wide Lonrho conglomerate, with his business verve, and Ian Smith, cunning as a rat, strike an African as at least understandable, real men. He can get on with them.

It may be argued that this amoral, undisciplined fatalism is common to all the demoralized, exploited people of the Third World. But comparisons do not fully bear this out. There are no African guerrillas with the unflinching discipline of the Vietcong. The Polisario fighters trying to win the Western Sahara from the king of Morocco come closest. They are hardly in the mainstream of sub-Saharan Africa, though; it was only in 1975 that the Polisario freed their own black slaves. There is no Communist Party leader who rivals the charismatic brilliance of Fidel Castro. These days, Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, the blood-stained Ethiopian leader, is nearest.

Yet lessons are being learned. With a generation passed, the collectivist ideals of the early days have been wholeheartedly discredited across the continent. The Soviet Union is less of a force in Africa than ever before. Of the OAU's fifty members, only three—Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia—voted for the Soviet Union during a key Afghan debate in the United Nations. Perhaps another half-dozen countries would normally tend to take the Soviet line against the American one. A dozen countries have a token presence of Cuban doctors or East German telephone-tappers. But most OAU members are to a greater extent than before conscious that friendship with the West is likely to yield the most material benefit. Even the Angolans are coming to this point of view, because the Russians do not have the best technology to offer. And Africans now know that in personal relations the Chinese and Russians are no less racist than the West Europeans and Americans.

Moreover, the benefits of a liberal, free-enterprise economy are increasingly recognized. Africa is still overwhelmingly rural, and the peasants universally expect governments to encourage them in their drive for betterment. The *kulak* remains a cant term in Marxist discussions of the African malaise: he must be destroyed. But it is in countries such as Kenya and the Ivory Coast, where the *kulak* has been given succor from state or private sources to help raise capital, borrow fertilizer, and so forth, that overall agricultural advancement has been most visible. It is interesting to note that the countries with the most liberal economies tend to be the ones that give their citizens the most political freedom. Kenya, for instance, has one of the best presses in Africa (though now, in a time of sharpening economic and internal political differences, it is coming under pressure from politicians who wish to manipulate it). By contrast, rigidly socialist Tanzania, across the border, is also politically less liberal.

AMID ALL THIS CONFUSION (AND I APPEAR, WITH MY secessionist sentiment, to be encouraging it) the Western journalist, equipped with political sympathies that are wholly incompatible with the ruthlessness of Africa, tries to push his pen—a losing battle. In African eyes, a journalist is a messenger-boy: you write the big man's speeches, or justify his zanier whims. There is no such thing as objectivity, although that is a much-favored word among those who pursue it least. Africans ridicule Westerners who believe that journalists can be objective. If you broadly support the cause of the Zimbabwean guerrillas, it is inconceivable that you might report a massacre carried out by Zimbabwean guerrillas. All that people want to know is whose side you are on.

It is probably true that the run-of-the-mill mass-circulation papers in the United States and Europe are not as interested as they might be in the building of dams, the eradication of illiteracy, and the glories of anti-malaria schemes. Their readers prefer to have their racist prejudices confirmed by gory tales of Emperor Bokassa's cannibalism or the threats, jocular if macabre, of the Liberian ruler, Samuel Doe, to shoot his national football team if it loses its match. This is unfair to Africa.

The serious Western press, on the other hand, bends over backward to see the black point of view, and this, paradoxically, is also unfair to Africa. In 1981 there were massacres in Nigeria; 7,000 people, by conservative estimates, died when police suppressed religious riots in Kano. In another instance, fifty prisoners suffocated in a prison van in Lagos; in another, sixty suspected smugglers perished in a cell in the Ivory Coast. To my knowledge, not a single British or American television crew covered any of these events, nor would there have been the slightest chance that they would have been given permission to do so if they had cared to ask. The incidents rated an obscure paragraph for a day or two. Imagine the weeks' worth of

stories and editorials in the world press that would have attended such events in South Africa. Then try to recall the minimal coverage of the genocide in Burundi in 1972, where as many as a quarter of a million Hutu—the lowest figure I have seen is 80,000—were systematically slaughtered by the Tutsi elite. The caste system in Burundi has notable parallels with that of South Africa, yet to this day there has not been a whimper of protest from the OAU. But we apply different standards to different situations; black-on-black (to use Andy Young's phrase) is not as bad as white-on-black oppression.

In fact, I happen to agree that South Africa should suffer as much adverse publicity as possible, to help make it change its beastly ways. I do not swallow Reagan's argument of "constructive engagement." But the double standard we, as Africanist reporters, are expected to apply is—or should be—a little troublesome to the conscience. In fact, we encourage illiberal and authoritarian regimes to get away with it handsomely: Angola and Mozambique, for example, allow no freedom whatsoever to journalists inside their countries. Journalists cannot leave the capitals unaccompanied; visas are hard to come by and no writer who reports adversely can expect another one. Angola is naturally determined to portray Dr. Jonas Savimbi, the anti-government guerrilla leader, as a burnt-out gangster of no real account, but no journalist has been allowed to wander freely in the central highlands, where Savimbi claims to be popular. Likewise Savimbi seems reluctant to take journalists up into the central plateau himself. (He takes them instead around the sparsely populated south-eastern corner of Angola, which is more or less uncontested by the government in Luanda.) All one can honestly assert is that each side has far less freedom of movement in the center of the country than it publicly insists. It is disgraceful, however, that experienced journalists, in order to be better placed to "go farther in next time," have to pull their punches in describing what they see or (often more significantly) what they cannot see.

In contrast to Angola and Mozambique, one can only ruefully reflect upon journalism in Rhodesia during the war there. In the end, more and more probing reporters, myself included, fell afoul of the authorities and were prevented from returning, but before that, never once was I prevented from traveling exactly where I wanted, fear permitting. One hopped into a car on one's own, hoped there were no land mines planted ahead, and drove. At the height of the war, there was no town that was inaccessible by ordinary unaccompanied vehicle. And one wrote about it. Not once did I have to hold back critical observations for fear of expulsion (I may, I think, have been the first journalist inside Rhodesia to describe the Rhodesian use of napalm). In Angola or Mozambique, however, it is a battle to get out of the capital, even with a state-appointed interpreter and guide to go along.

But then Smith, in his pitiful and deceitful way, was half bound by the rules, which he recognized but flouted, of the

liberal West. He liked the illusion (he may even have believed it) that his press was "free." In Angola and Mozambique, there is no such illusion: as a journalist you are allowed to write if it helps the government. And this applies to a great extent throughout Africa. Until four years ago, no English-language newspaper was allowed to have a permanent representative in Lagos, the capital of the largest state in Africa. So when we were occasionally let in, we pandered to the authorities and kept off sensitive subjects. It emasculated reporting but allowed another trip.

"Excuses, excuses, excuses," heckled a colleague on the London *Observer* whose métier is to harass Western politicians—mainly British ones—in a way that would be quite unheard of for the political writer in Africa. He's right. In the end, through a remorseless determination to wear the fixed, understanding smile, to see the "underlying causes" of the African malaise, one becomes unintentionally racist. We Western reporters have allowed Africans to play by different rules when it suits them while heaping moral anger and ridicule upon white supremacists for their scarcely unusual desire to assert their own tribal dominance. By trying too hard to be fair to the blacks, the *Observer* and countless other benign voices further insult Africa. Positive discrimination is, after all, discrimination. If we want Africans to be treated as equals, it is time we judged and damned them as equals.

The confusion is noticeably worse for American journalists, whose consciences are constantly pricked by the seeming parallels of black America and black Africa. White Americans all too often come to black Africa determined to "help the black man," on the assumption that all he needs is money, education, and freedom from prejudice. But in fact there are no similarities between the state of the black American and that of the black African. The former, whether he or she likes it or not, is wholly and irredeemably American in aspirations and culture, and needs simply to be treated as well as or as badly as white Americans are. In Africa, the white liberal confuses sameness with equality. The black Africans are equal, yes: but through centuries of different customs they are by no means the same in their aspirations and attitudes as Americans, white or black. To treat them on a basis of sameness is to impose values that another people may not wish to share.

SO THE LIBERAL GUILT IS NOT, IN THE END, ASsuaged. Marxists can deftly circumvent the awkward questions: the amorality of Africa and its leadership is deliberately fostered by the conspiring international capitalists, who forge an alliance of avarice and evil between the multinational boss class and a hand-picked caucus of neo-colonial black puppets. The masses are ready for Lenin. Even tribalism, the Marxists argue, is deliberately whipped up by international capitalism to keep the Africans divided and to allow the puppets to ma-



nipulate their own sectors of the people for their own base (capitalist) motives.

But the Western liberal is further adrift than the Marxist. The liberal explanations and excuses are simply not enough. The brutal fact is that the white liberal, intent on giving Africa the benefit of his own ideals, is the friend of the soon-to-be-liberated African only until the latter is in power. Once African power is achieved, it is plain that for most Africans, leaders and led, liberalism is a West European absurdity. They would rather deal with Castro and Tiny Rowland, and they do.

The final humiliation for the serious Western reporter is that, in general, Africa is recognized to be back where it was fifty years ago: a continent of little international importance, sparsely populated though growing too fast to feed itself, inherently unstable politically, with little hope of realizing its economic (especially agricultural) potential for at least a generation or two. The numerous and much-touted future "breadbaskets" and "granaries" are still empty: the green hills and savanna of southern Sudan, for instance. The food just will not grow, so long as the political instability remains and attitudes are utterly at odds with the demands of Western technology or organizational methods. Long-term investors are probably less willing now than they were ten years ago to take risks in Africa:

ideologists are less willing to practice their social experiments there. Even the strategic arguments weigh less heavily. If Togo is pro-Western, Benin is likely to be pro-Soviet, and so on. Burundi, ideologically probably more "right-wing" than its mini-rival Rwanda, had a small Russian and Cuban presence; so, in return, Rwanda, though marginally more leftist, has more Belgians. And in most cases, it matters not a jot to the rest of the world. Africa's weakness, indeed, may prove to be its eventual strength. No one is going to drop a neutron bomb on it.

One French correspondent begins almost every piece as follows: "In potentially mineral-rich and strategically crucial X. . . ." It could be Chad, Mauritania, Sudan, Malawi, Gabon, you name it. Most countries in Africa have three or four adjacent territories, can offer airbase facilities, have "untapped wealth." Most OAU members have a potential seaport. But the artificiality of the states, their tribal confusion, the weakness of ideology, and the waywardness of leaders all make Africa too complicated by far for any superpower to wade into with assurance. There is potential for plunder at high risk by adventurers, and there is the prospect of febrile escapism for reporters like myself, bored with the gray monotony of the West. But sensible people these days—foreign governments, businesses, and journalists—are learning to keep out. □



ANECDOTES FROM THE HOSPITAL

A SHORT STORY
BY ANATOLE BROYARD

DR. STEEN'S WHITE SHOES HAVE THICK CREPE soles, as if he wishes to cushion himself against the hard things he has to say and do. They give his walk a hopeful bounce.

His head is round in its crew cut, candidly revealing the contours of the human brain. His eyebrows lift in perpetual surprise at the instability of his species, its vulnerability to illness, deterioration, and death. The study of medicine, its tantalizing promise and continual disappointments, has incised two horizontal lines in Dr. Steen's forehead. From time to time, he purses his full lips as if he were about to whistle.

His body is square in its starched uniform, suggesting a reassuring geometry, mass, measurable quantities. Around his neck, like a string tie, hangs a stethoscope, which he fingers while he speaks. Occasionally he will pull it off and thrust it into his pocket, as if to say that science can do no more.

Like a dispatcher of trucks, buses, or planes, Dr. Steen carries a clipboard. When people have to be dispatched—for this is a terminal ward—he stands in the corridor and watches the orderly roll them away in their beds, his free hand fluttering at his side with the wish to wave good-bye.

In constant motion, Dr. Steen encourages his patients to join him in opposing a fatal stillness. He mauls his scalp, pulls at his jaw, wriggles, hunches and squares his shoulders, shifts and paddles his feet in their crepe soles. His eyes dart and move, follow the nurses as they pass—not with interest or desire but in a mute appeal for solidarity and support. He clears his throat more than a doctor should.

While my father pretends to dislike Jews, he is pleased to have Dr. Steen on his case. Though he never says it in so many words, I know what he is thinking. Jews are inquisitive: Dr. Steen will feel the goods and find out what is wrong with my father. Jews are tenacious: nobody is going to take anything away from them. It's bad business to lose a patient, let merchandise spoil. When it comes to bargaining, you can't beat the Jews: with a little luck, Dr. Steen might manage to Jew down death.

Anatole Broyard is a book critic for The New York Times.

MISS SHANNON IS NOT MY IDEA OF A NURSE. WITH her creamy complexion and bleached-blond hair, the white uniform makes her look more like a demonstrator at a cosmetics counter. She shrieks with health, as if she were selling it. I can almost hear the blood gurgling like old-fashioned plumbing through her veins.

She smiles. Not a nurse's smile—compassionate, encouraging, mechanical—but a flirtatious grin. She's too young and pretty, too *sexual*, to be here. And what a curious word, *nurse*, as if the men in her ward were babies. It is one of her duties to give them shots in the buttocks, and when she shoves in the needle with that smile of hers, it looks as if she's goosing them. Or she could be a child sticking pins into balloons—balloons already punctured.

My father has escaped this treatment, since he is on oral medication, so we are unprepared when she appears on the other side of the bed and throws back the covers. I have just begun a sentence, which breaks off abruptly, as if she has thrown my words back with the covers.

Slipping one hand under my father, she flips him like a pancake. She does it easily, smoothly, even gently, smiling all the while. Is he so light, so dried-up, I wonder, or is it a trick she has, some kind of nurse's karate? When she pulls down his pajama bottoms and thrusts the needle in, a shudder of pain or shame or pleasure ripples through my father.

Behind his back, our eyes meet and her smile closes up like a woman closing her legs. Her eyes are large, blue, and unblinking. The look she shows me is surgical, a nurse's look that knows everything, that has seen everything.

She reads the challenge in my eyes: You are here to be functional, not decorative. Why can't you suppress yourself, bandage up your sex and go about your business?

Don't try to bully me, her eyes say. Don't give me your masculine boast. I know what you've got and what you can and can't do. You are not a novelty to me, so relax. Sit back and save your attention for this man in the bed.

She withdraws the needle, pulls up my father's pajamas, flips him again, and flicks the covers into place. Her economy is uncanny, yet when she walks away the play of her unpunctured buttocks under the white nylon mocks the very idea of economy.

MY FATHER'S FEET ARE IVORY-WHITE AND SMOOTH, waxy and odorless, almost pretty. The blue veins have receded, leaving only a trace. After months in bed, his calluses have softened and his toes, cramped for so many years by pointed shoes, appear to be straightening out.

His feet are cold. When Dr. Steen suggested that I massage them, he said they have more nerve endings than most parts of the body. I examine my father's feet, as if I could see the nerve endings. I massage them with both hands, moving from one to the other, glad to have something to do. My father had said nothing to the doctor's suggestion and he says nothing now. The only difficult moment was when I pulled out the covers at the bottom of the bed and took his feet in my hands.

My father's father had four daughters. He lived in the French Quarter in New Orleans, and when he came home from work in hot weather he would sit on the porch while one of his daughters bathed his feet in a tin basin painted with flowers. The water was scented with lemon juice. Another daughter wound the gramophone and changed the records. A third daughter brought a drink and the evening paper on a tray, while the fourth plied a fan.

THOUGH HE IS NOT SLEEPING, MY FATHER HAS closed his eyes. He does this sometimes, as if to spare me even the reflection of what he sees. He is tactful about dying. Now he opens his eyes again and looks at me. "Your mother," he says, "always had bad feet."

"I know," I say.

"She can't walk."

"Not fast."

"She makes a face with every step. It takes the pleasure out of going anywhere."

I picture her putting one foot in front of another, each step a separate action, as if she counted them out. When I was a child I thought that mothers naturally moved slowly, like glaciers.

"She tried all kinds of shoes," my father says. "Red Cross. Enna Jettick. Orthopedic." He pauses, reviews their unequal progress. "I couldn't adjust to her pace."

I don't believe he tried. He used to spurt up the street, leaving us behind, as if we were chasing him. I would be torn between trying to catch up and staying back with her.

While I massage his feet, my father broods on my mother's. "You know what she did?" His tone is indignant. He comes alive with irritation.

"What did she do?" At some point during his time at the hospital our conversations assumed the form of a Socratic dialogue.

My father pauses for emphasis. He measures me with his eyes to see whether I can withstand it. "She started going barefoot."

"Barefoot?"

"In the house. She wouldn't wear shoes in the house."

Before I can answer—answer what?—he goes on. "She stopped combing her hair. She turned into a savage."

Something in me protests. "I don't remember that."

He brushes this away with his hand. "You were too young to remember."

When was I ever too young to remember? Could this have been my ordinary little mother? A wave of kindness, romance almost, washes over me. I see my mother smiling, humming softly to herself. She is young and graceful in a long, flowing dress. With her tossed hair and bare feet, she is a diminutive Isadora Duncan.

My father's eyes look fiercely into mine. "A woman," he says, "ought to be dainty." He stares all around the ward, daring anyone to contradict him.

I am between them again and I choose, this time, to hang back with her. "Maybe she felt dainty in her bare feet. You know, like a dancer."

"A dancer!" With a strength I didn't know he had, my father pulls his foot from my hands. "A dancer!" he says. "Your mother was no kind of dancer at all."

He closes his eyes. His breathing settles down. He is going to sleep. My mother's feet, her dancing, have worn him out.

"YOUR FATHER COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED, YOU know," Dr. Steen says. We are standing by the window in the corridor.

"I didn't know."

"It all started with a polyp, no bigger than a grape." He makes a circle with his thumb and forefinger.

"What exactly is a polyp?"

"A tumor on the mucous membrane. We could have cut it out."

"They never told me. They said the cancer had reached his bones."

Dr. Steen paddles his feet and the crepe soles squeak on the floor. He looks down at them in surprise. "It was too late then."

"It's too late now."

He runs his free hand, the one without the clipboard, down his other arm, from the shoulder to the wrist. He pinches his lower lip.

He has something on his mind and I'm waiting for him to say it, but he is studying the back of his clipboard, which is made of marbled green plastic. I try to prompt him. "Is there something I should do with this information?"

He makes a little movement with his restless hand. "Information, factual information, that is, is always . . . always useful."

I wait. I'm becoming a virtuoso at waiting.

He clears his throat. "We all have to go sometime," he says, "but it's wasteful when it can be avoided." He gazes out the window at a landscape of waste.

"Where was the polyp?"

"On the lining of his rectum."

"It could have been detected?"

"A proctosigmoidoscopy. Looking into the rectum with an instrument. If your father had believed in checkups, the polyp would probably have been discovered and removed."

But my father did believe in checkups. He was never more contented than when he had a square or a spirit level in his hands, his eye tracing the true. That's why he loved the building trade: he wanted to square up and straighten out the world. He checked up on everything but himself.

"How long do you suppose he had the polyp before it spread?"

Dr. Steen calculates. He shuts his eyes as if in pain. "Years," he says. "The body fights back as long as it can."

"It does?"

He mistrusts the question. I can see that he mistrusts it, but he answers anyway. "Yes," he says.

How, Dr. Steen? I want to ask. How does it fight back? Like men fighting in a bar? Like dogs fighting in the street?

When he goes off on his rounds, I remain at the window. Down in the frozen street the ice melts. The sun breaks out. Leaves appear on the trees. My father comes up the walk and enters the hospital for a checkup. Dr. Steen inserts the instrument in his rectum and he lives to be a hundred.

It is growing dark and I see myself reflected in the windowpane. I feel disembodied, suspended between myself and the image in the glass. I have a sense of being the only person in this hospital who is absolutely idle.

What would I do, how would I feel, if Dr. Steen were to say to me, "It's all a mistake. The polyp is benign. Your father can go home."

I'd be glad, of course. Yet there is something . . . I hate to say it, but there is something in me that wants to be alone. I want to be my own father.

IT'S A WARD BOY'S MISTAKE, THE WHEELCHAIR BESIDE my father's bed, but he doesn't see it that way. For him, it's a reprieve, a fresh diagnosis.

Though his legs won't support him, his arms are still strong, and before I understand what he's doing, he has muscled himself out of the bed and into the chair. He seizes the rims like a man who knows where he's going.

X marks the spot. The idea is to get away from the spot, to keep moving. He spins out into the aisle, makes a racing turn. He's a new man, he's in the driver's seat. We're already in the corridor, and he opens up while I stand back and watch. He makes a couple of runs from one end of the corridor to the other, just for the feel of it.

We tour the whole floor and he starts handling the chair with style. He's always been good with his hands. When we come back to his ward, he won't get into bed. Sitting in the chair, he tickles it with his fingertips, keeping it vibrating. He's not lying down any longer. He's a man on the way up.

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, DOCTORS DISAGREED about the criteria for death, and various "life tests" were devised. One doctor blew a trumpet at the patient: if he didn't respond, he was assumed to be dead.

I'm interested in this doctor and his test. I imagine him carrying his trumpet to the patient's bed, wiping the mouthpiece with a silk handkerchief. Does he position himself at the foot of the bed or the side? Does he bend over the patient and blow into his ear, or does he stand at attention like a bugler blowing taps?

He wears a powdered wig and knee breeches, a flared coat. His conception of the trumpet derives from Bach, Handel, and Purcell, a tight, clear, collected sound. But would he have any skill on the instrument? Wouldn't he blow a sour note?

Would one note be enough—any note, high or low, sweet or sour—or would the doctor feel obliged to master the scale? If he blew too sweetly, wouldn't that defeat the purpose? And the other patients, how would they react? Would they stiffen in their beds, cover their ears, pull the pillows over their heads?

Louis Armstrong is my father's favorite trumpet player. In New Orleans, where both of them were born, there was often the sound of a trumpet in the air. When someone died in the French Quarter, a jazz band might accompany his funeral through the streets. If they knew him well, the band would compose a blues for the dead man.

Do I know him well enough? Could I compose a blues for him? Or would I, like the doctor, just make a noise?

TODAY IS SATURDAY, AND IF HE WEREN'T HERE IN the hospital my father would be on Broadway. Every Saturday morning he used to leave our house in Brooklyn to go to Broadway. He believed in Broadway, just as he believed in boulevards. He was a walker who had to get out into the street and make sure that the world was there. In New Orleans, every man was a boulevardier.

He would start out at exactly eleven o'clock, and I would stand in the front yard and watch him as far as the corner. Moving fast, almost dancing, he twitched his shoulders in his tight jacket until it sat just right, until some secret sense of fittingness was satisfied. He stood very straight—at five feet nine inches he saw himself as a tall man—and his pants were pulled high on his chest to show off his long legs. He believed he had unusually long legs.

When he was walking away, especially when he was walking away, there was a kind of jazz in my father's movements, a rhythm compounded of economy and flourishes, functional and decorative.

We never asked him where he went on Saturdays—he was just "going out for a walk"—but we knew. Something in his pride kept him from telling us, but it slipped out in his stories. He was a great storyteller—not a conversationalist, but a storyteller—and I think of him now as a stranger in a city of strangers, shopping for stories.

What did he do on Broadway? How did he pass the hours between eleven in the morning and seven in the evening, when he would return as punctually as he had left? Did he watch a double feature in the midday dark, his hat on the seat beside him his only companion? Did he have his glistering shoes shined yet again? I picture him standing against a building, one foot raised on the box, surveying the street over his cigar. In the Automat, he eats two fish cakes with tomato sauce and a bowl of preserved figs. Back on the street, he studies shop windows filled with haberdashery, knives and scissors, wristwatches and rings, Florsheim shoes like his own. He lingers before a novelty shop to ponder boutonnieres that squirt water, papier-mâché dog messes, itching powder, and other amusements. Outside the Tango Palace, he coolly examines photographs of the hostesses. In the penny arcade, he plays the slot machines, moves on to the shooting gallery, where he knocks down little yellow ducks.

Once, when I was six or seven, he took me to the shooting gallery on a holiday. Squeeze, he said. Hold your breath and squeeze. My cheeks puffed out, my finger trembling with joy on the trigger, I squeezed. The rifle made a petulant noise and the duck didn't fall. "Your father is a crack shot," the attendant said.

Could my father have had a woman on Broadway? A woman who waited for him among fringed lampshades,

gazing into a compact, wiping with a lacquered fingertip the lipstick crusted in the corners of her mouth? No, not a woman. No woman could have met the hope expressed in the angle of his hat brim, in the gleam of his shoes, in the stickpin thrust through his tie into his heart.

MY FATHER JUST GROANED.

It's an impressive sound, a groan, as impressive in its way as the growl of a lion or the moan of a cello. It begins in his belly, a vibration buried in his guts, then moves up through his lungs and chest, collecting in his throat and chiming in his sinuses before forcing its way out through his teeth and closed lips. A long *ohhh*, which the gritting of his teeth, the clamping of his jaws, turns into *grohhh*. Then a gradual, strenuous biting off of the breath backs it up into the sinuses and gives it a nasal ending like a jazz singer's held note.

An organ in the cathedral of his ribs, a massed roar of protest from a crowd in a square, a ship's timbers groaning in a storm. In the Ituri forest, the pygmies blow into a thirty-foot horn at midnight, imitating the beasts of the jungle.

I would call the nurse, but there's nothing she can do. There isn't much I can do either. I can only listen. I can listen, and maybe I can add that groan to my vocabulary.



THE SEA

Stroke by
stroke my
body remembers that life and cries for
the lost parts of itself—
fins, gills
opening like flowers into
the flesh—my legs
want to lock and become
one muscle, I swear I know
just what the blue-gray scales
shingling
the rest of me would
feel like!
paradise! Sprawled
in that motherlap,
in that dreamhouse
of salt and exercise,
what a spillage
of nostalgia pleads
from the very bones! how

they long to give up the long trek
inland, the brittle
beauty of understanding,
and dive,
and simply
become again a flaming body
of blind feeling
sleeking along
in the luminous roughage of the sea's body,
vanished
like victory inside that
insucking genesis, that
roaring flamboyance, that
perfect
beginning and
conclusion of our own.

—Mary Oliver

MY FATHER IS CHATTING WITH KREBNICK IN HIS hardware store when a big blonde walks in. She is a young Mae West, a Florodora girl, my father's type.

She needs a new lock for her door, she says to Krebnick. Though she can't explain it, though it's just superstition, she can't shake the feeling that someone else has a key to her lock. "I won't be easy in my mind," she says, "until it's changed."

"You know how to change a lock?" Krebnick asks.

"No," the blonde says.

Krebnick glances at my father. They are old friends. "Why, you couldn't have picked a better time," he says. "This gentleman here is one of the cornerstones of the construction industry in New York City."

The blonde turns her blue eyes on my father, who raises his hat. "Oh," she says, "I couldn't ask an important man like him to waste his time on me."

"My pleasure," my father says. Krebnick supplies a cylinder and a screwdriver.

Her apartment is around the corner. In two minutes, my father replaces the cylinder and inserts the new key. "I love a man who can do things," the blonde says.

They sit in a small parlor, where she puts two bottles of Budweiser on coasters bearing the legend "Here's looking at you." They touch glasses and my father takes a polite sip. After a significant pause, he drains the glass and places it decisively on the coaster. Dropping his hand on the blonde's thigh, he says, "How about you and me having a little fun?"

She giggles. "There's a nice clean bed in the next room," she says. "Can you pick me up and put me in it?"

"Why, I wouldn't have a woman I couldn't lift," my father says. As if she didn't outweigh him by twenty-five pounds, he snatches her up and carries her into the bedroom.

She runs into the bathroom. When she comes out in a peignoir, she has a can of talcum powder in her hand. As my father lies naked on the bed, she dusts him all over.

Sitting by this other bed, I am reminded by my father's muscular arms of this story. He told it to me when I was fifteen years old. There was no preparation, no precedent, for it. Nor was there anything in his manner to suggest that he was joking.

When he had finished the story, he drew no moral that I could see. He told it in the same way that he made one of his end tables in the basement. It didn't matter that I had no place to put it.

Had there actually been a blonde, or was this just a story of a lock and key? Her prose style, her "pick me up," the talcum powder—these had to be his embellishments.

It might have happened. I'll never know. Does it matter? His arms on the sheet are real.

TOWARD THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, A Swiss geology professor published a report on the reactions of a number of people who had survived near-fatal falls in the Alps. Each of them thought he was falling to his death, and according to the professor none of them felt any anxiety, pain, or despair, only "a calm seriousness, profound acceptance and a dominant mental quickness and sense of surety." Their mental activity, the professor said, was "enormous, rising to a hundred-fold velocity or intensity."

Ah, how I wish this might be true for my father, that he might know a beautiful falling, a fall filled with calm seriousness and profound acceptance, a fall in which his mental activity, rising to a hundred-fold velocity or intensity, would enable him to take in everything, including me, with a dominant sense of surety.

Perhaps he *is* feeling this; how do I know he isn't? He could be falling inside, invisibly, which would explain his preoccupation, his silences. I hope so, I hope he is falling like that.

But where would he be falling from? You have to reach a great height—the professor's people did—before you can have such a fall.

Though he was not an alpine climber, my father was a builder; he climbed buildings. And that's the trouble: if he fell, he might fall like a man falling from a building, plummeting to the ground, flailing his arms and legs and trying to fly, to grab hold and hang in the air.

WE HAD A DOG WHEN I WAS SEVEN OR EIGHT, A German shepherd named Big Boy. A friend of my mother's gave him to us. She couldn't keep him because she lived alone and was away at work all day. Big Boy, she said, was a family dog.

He was about two years old, a good-looking gray-and-tan shepherd with lively eyes. His mouth was usually open, his tail going, his ears erect. He was a very spontaneous dog, and always found ways to amuse us.

Since I was the only child in the family, it might have seemed natural for Big Boy to be my dog, but he wasn't. He was my father's dog. He knew when my father was coming home and would sit by the door giving ecstatic little barks. My father taught him all sorts of tricks. Big Boy had a great aptitude for tricks, and they would play together for hours at a time. When my father pretended to attack my mother, Big Boy would bark as if he had an Oedipus complex.

When he had been with us for about a year, Big Boy died. He choked to death on a chicken bone that stuck in his throat. We knew better than to give him chicken bones, so he must have gotten it out of the garbage.

We phoned the vet, but he was on a call and came too late. By the time my father got home from work, Big Boy was dead. My mother wrapped him in a sheet and my father carried him out to the vet's car.

At dinner the next evening, it seemed strange not to see Big Boy sitting there watching us and begging for scraps. Without him, it seemed as if we were no longer a family, just three people eating in the same place.

For a while we ate in silence, and then my father put down his knife and fork. "I miss my dog," he said in a husky voice, and his eyes filled with tears. I had never seen him like that.

The memory sticks in my throat, like the bone in Big Boy's. I would have liked to say something to my father. I might have said, "I'll be your dog, Small Boy. I can do tricks too."

But the occasion passed, I let it get away. I'll try not to let the next one get away, though. If I can learn the trick of it, I'll bark, I'll bite, I'll beg.

"SHE TURNED HER BACK ON ME," MY FATHER says. These are his first words in a long afternoon in which I watched the traffic in the ward the way old Italian women in the Village watch all day from their windows. I had noted again the splendor of Miss Shannon's ass in its white nylon uniform. I observed the black ward boy strutting his jivey walk, as if he thought he could dance out of reach of illness and decay. I considered the other visitors and wondered how they found so much to talk about.

When my father speaks, it isn't clear whether he is talking to me or to himself. He doesn't move his head or his eyes to look at me, and there is nothing in his voice. This is an old question anyway, for he has a habit of talking to himself. When I was small, I didn't understand this, and I used to follow him around and try to get between him and himself.

He always talked to himself in the cellar, where he had fixed up a little tool shop for working at his hobby. In his spare time he made end tables down there. If he'd had his way, everything in the world would have had an end table beside it. While he worked, he talked, rehearsing what he was going to do, coaxing the table into shape.

His tone would be jocular, as if the table were an audience on which he practiced his comedy. One of his favorite expressions was "Watch Harvey." I would shift around him, trying to catch his eye, asking "Who's Harvey? Why are you going to shave the board? Why do you have to take it down?"

"She turned her back." He says it again. There is something on his mind, and it's up to me to move it along, just as I help him sit up in the bed or walk to the toilet. "Who?" I say. "Who turned her back on you?" I think I know, because there's only one she where we're concerned.

His mouth works. He has developed a habit of testing it before he speaks, as if to see if it still functions. One of his hands gropes on the sheet, gathering the details of the

scene in his mind. "I had to get up," he says, "and walk the streets. I had to get dressed and go out."

There are no surprises in families. At first when you hear things, you think you're amazed, and then you realize that you knew all along. Yet you go on, you keep asking. "Why?" I ask. "Why did you have to get dressed and walk the streets?"

He sucks in his lips. With his false teeth out, his mouth becomes inverted, as if he is talking into his own head. "My blood was up," he says. "I had to get out and get hold of myself."

Ours is a residential neighborhood, lined with heavy maples that shroud the streetlamps. People go to bed early and there are no lights in the windows. My father moves rapidly beneath the dark branches. A shadowy figure, he thrusts out his arms as he walks, trying to get hold of himself. From time to time he emerges into a patch of light between the trees. His clothes, flung on in haste, are disheveled. His shirttail hangs out.

In our house, my mother lies on her side, snoring lightly.

MY FATHER MOVES AWAY FROM ME IN THE WHEEL-chair. He travels not in a straight line but in a kind of arabesque. After a short run, he stops and reverses his direction. He saws back and forth, spinning the chair on its axis, the chrome-plated rims glittering in the bleak light of the corridor. The veins stand out on his hands like tribal scars.

He pauses and cocks his head as if he is listening. His chest rises and falls under the cotton bathrobe, his breathing parts his lips. Rowing his arms, he begins again.

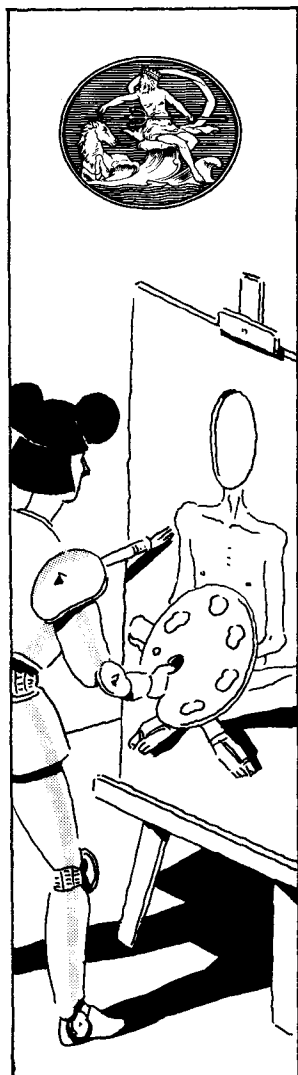
He doesn't see me, framed in the small high window of the swinging door. I hesitate to show myself, to break in on him, because I don't understand what he is doing here. It is the last place I looked, this corridor. When I didn't see him in the ward and couldn't find him anywhere on the floor, I thought he might have wheeled himself home, as he has often threatened to do.

He pauses again, halfway down the corridor, and flexes his fingers, opening and closing them like a child counting by tens, working out the stiffness that keeps settling in. Looking back, still blind to me, he studies his tracks, as if he has written a message on the floor. His movements become sharper, more precise. The chair is a smooth tool in his hands. Nobody is better with tools than he is. He turns so tightly that one foot flies off the footplate and he has to pull back his dead leg with his hands.

Now he stops the chair and rests his elbows on the arms. Throwing his head back, he closes his eyes and listens again to something only he can hear. He stays like that for a while and then he opens his eyes and claps his hands. I can hear it through the door. He's beating a rhythm, and when the chair starts to move again, I understand that he's dancing. □

FILLMORE REGAINED

BY ROY BLOUNT, JR.



I GUESS YOU SAW the headlines: "So You Swallowed George's Wooden Teeth? Get Them Out of Your Head—Dental Historian." There is no way, historians now agree, that George Washington could have had wooden teeth.

Okay? First the cherry tree, now the teeth. Another old chestnut tossed onto the fire by the spoilsport, or "No, Virginia," school of historiography.

The trouble with historians, they don't like a good story. Or a good line. "You know what Sherman said . . .," you begin to say, and they interrupt: Sherman didn't really say "War is hell." Actually he said either "Well, well" or "Well, hell"; there is no telling what he had on his mind. And Babe Ruth didn't really call his shot in the 1932 World Series. He was actually signaling to a vendor in the bleachers for a frank. Several years ago, I remember, a couple of French historians declared that there was no Joan of Arc. Never was one. Best just forget her.

We all know what prompts these disclosures. Some historian starts telling his class about Joan of Arc. "This morning we take up the story of a simple shepherd girl who . . ."

"Oh, no," the class groans. (Because they are all jaded sophomores.) "Not that again."

"Well, not a word of it is true," the historian says, hastily; and then he begins to improvise.

It is easy to tear things down, History! What are you going to give us to take their place? If Joan of Arc wasn't a simple shepherd girl who had visions and led the French against the English at Orléans and went on to be burned at the stake and played by Ingrid Bergman and Jean Seberg, then who was?

No one, according to these French historians. The whole thing was a publicity stunt. Joan was actually a girl of royal blood who was brought out at Orléans for morale purposes. She wasn't exe-

cuted at all. She later married someone named Robert.

What a charming tale. What are we supposed to do now, when Joan of Arc's birthday comes around? Reflect on what a kick it must have given Joan and Robert (pron. "Ro-bair") in their declining years to sit at home and chuckle about all the crazy legends a girl can start if she will play along with the military?

When that story came out, it didn't just spoil Joan of Arc for me. It spoiled history as a whole. I threw up my hands. I became willing to accept that nothing ever happened in ages past that couldn't be reduced to simple administrative terms, or worse.

Rasputin was just a minor Russian official who had a little something going with the Tsarina, and she worked up a disguise for him that everyone but the Tsar saw through from the beginning. He died in a boating accident.

Mohandas Gandhi was actually a portly behind-the-scenes type who dressed, mutatis mutandis, like Col. Tom Parker, except that—in the curious belief that it would impress the English—he carried a shillelagh. For photo opportunities, of course, there were the several interchangeable, wizened stand-ins.

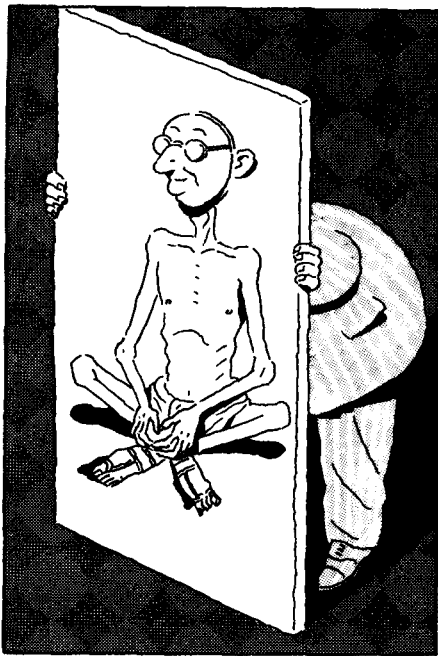
Cleopatra was a man, and not even a very prepossessing one, who, as a matter of fact, was immune, because of the quantities of garlic he ate, to asp venom.

The historical Charlemagne wasn't a man but rather a primitive committee.

Vincent Van Gogh never set foot outside the town of Bort-les-Orgues, France, and his mother painted all of his best things. The famous mailed decapitated ear was a figment of the public-relations firm engaged by Van Gogh's dealer—himself not an imaginative person. Actually, Van Gogh never had a mistress, and took both of his ears to the grave. Indeed, the only reason that the outsized woolen cap his mother made him wear never slipped completely down over his eyes was that his ears were always so large and firmly attached. He

Roy Blount's new book, *One Fell Soup*, will be published in October.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEVEN GUARNACCIA



never had any moods, incidentally, to speak of.

Romulus and Remus were no more suckled by a wolf than you and I and Henry Steele Commager were. They were suckered on a wharf.

Then I snapped back out of italics and started to think: "History, wait a minute. You owe me more than that." I can understand why historians resist being doomed to repeat themselves, but why don't they try making historical figures more numinous, instead of less? That's what the average person would do, if he or she had the chance to be a historian.

Millard Fillmore. If the truth be told, Fillmore would roll into the Oval Office about 9:45 in the morning after being up half the night playing Whigs and Masons with Henry Clay. Whigs and Masons was a wrestling game. It is said—even if not by historians—that Fillmore would summon Alex H. H. Stuart, his Secretary of the Interior¹, to tie his (Fillmore's) right foot to his (again, Fillmore's) left arm and then he (yes, Fillmore) would still throw Clay four times in five. Of Whigs and Masons, Fillmore was the Magic Johnson.

But after getting into the office a couple of hours behind everybody else—and

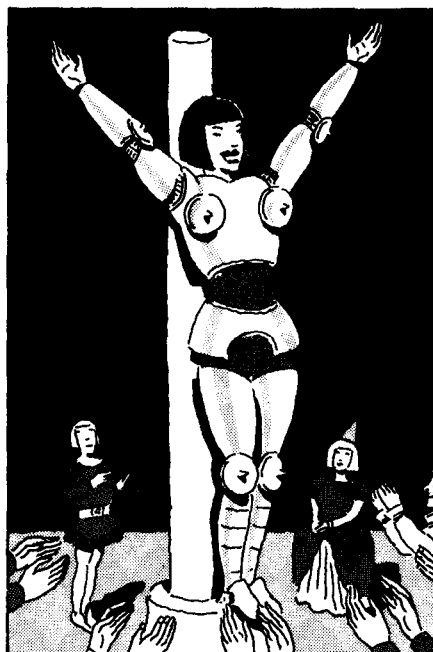
¹Ironically enough quite an extrovert, Stuart was a real pistol in his own right whose mother, a seeress, had imparted unto him the power literally to contain multitudes. It is from his middle initials alone that we derive not only Hubert Humphrey and Herbert Hoover but also Horace Heidt.

you know the secretaries are all grumbling because why should they be at their desks hitting it bright and early when the President was out till all hours horsing around—Fillmore would immediately put everyone in a dynamic, progressive frame of mind by telling how he bested legendary riverman Mike Fink in a gator-cowing contest. (Fillmore, in only a breechclout, once cowed a 1,200-pound gator just by going "Well?" at it. This has been documented.)

Then Fillmore would make a statement of national purpose so clearly put and deeply felt that all those who heard him, however small their roles in the government's workings, felt lifted and involved: this, Fillmore's listeners felt, is why we must hold our great plural union together, and never let it succumb to meanness or fixed ideas. And "here," the White House staff and any average citizens on hand would reflect, "is one who is larger than we, yet one of us."

At which juncture Clay might pop in, tousled from the night before. (No matter what he had been up to, Fillmore always arrived for business looking cleaner than the Board of Health.) Fillmore would wink at Clay's stout, scuffed Kentucky brogans and lighten the moment with a remark about "feet of Clay," which Clay himself—being possessed of a firm yet unoppressive sense of his own authenticity—would take in good spirits.

Another thing about Fillmore, he never secretly taped his telephone conversations. □



BOOKS

THE PASIONARIA OF STYLE

BY HILTON KRAMER

A SUSAN SONTAG READER
Introduction by Elizabeth
Hardwick. Farrar, Straus and
Giroux, \$17.95.



It is now just over twenty years—by traditional calculation, a generation—since Susan Sontag burst upon the New York literary scene with a series of essays and reviews that had everybody talking. It is worth recalling, however, that the talk was by no means universally favorable. Yet the disfavor these critical studies met with was of a special kind, and did nothing to impede the fame they rapidly brought to their author. Whether she wrote about *Flaming Creatures* or Albert Camus, about "Camp" taste or Claude Lévi-Strauss or the movies of Godard and Bresson, Sontag seemed to have an unfailing faculty for dividing intellectual opinion and inspiring a sense of outrage, consternation, and betrayal among the many readers—especially older readers—who disagreed with her. And it was just this faculty for offending respectable opinion that, from the outset, was an important part of her appeal for those who welcomed her pronouncements. She was admired not only for what she said but for the pain, shock, and disarray she caused in saying it.

Sontag thus succeeded in doing something that it is given to very few critics to achieve. She made criticism a medium of intellectual scandal, and this won her instant celebrity in the world where ideas are absorbed into fashions and fashions combine to create a new cultural atmosphere. In 1966, when her early essays were collected, in *Against Interpretation*—the book's very title was a provocation—she was hailed as a contemporary classic. Scarcely five years had passed since she had made her literary debut. So far-reaching was her renown that it quickly found its way even into the distant literary underground behind the Iron Curtain. On a visit to Leningrad only a year after the appearance of *Against Interpretation*, I met young writers and university students who had

already read her work and were full of eager questions about it.

As is usually the case with careers of this sort, the element of timing was crucial. Criticism was unquestionably in the doldrums in the early 1960s. The literary culture that had long nourished it—the culture of modernism, with its “difficult” texts requiring lengthy and laborious study—was already in decline. Literature itself, of the high, serious, complex kind, had begun to look a little stuffy and calcified—an academic rather than a creative or a vital interest. The attention that had formerly been concentrated on literary analysis was now turning with greater enthusiasm and a more evident sense of pleasure to movies, dance, the visual arts, and certain modes of popular culture. The whole ethos of moral earnestness and finical discrimination that had dominated cultural life in the 1950s, uniting such otherwise disparate endeavors as abstract expressionism in painting and the new criticism in literature, had clearly collapsed. Exactly what was in store to take its place was not yet obvious or defined, but the appetite for change and release was sharp and accelerating.

In retrospect, it now appears that 1959 was the pivotal year in this development. That was the year the first Happenings were staged in the New York art world. That was the year, too, of Godard's *Breathless*, Truffaut's *The Four Hundred Blows*, and Fellini's *La dolce vita*. And with the publication that same year of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*, literature, too, joined in the movement to disembarass itself of its old constraints and stake out a territory similarly devoid of inhibition, formality, and other impediments to the unfettered expression of the self.

What gave Sontag's early essays their aura of daring and controversy was the remarkable air of confidence she brought to the task of defending and codifying the values implicit in this movement to strip the arts of what she herself described as “moral sentiments.” Bidding a not-so-fond farewell to art that was conceived, as she put it, as “a species of moral journalism,” she hailed the advent of a “new sensibility,” whose most dis-

Hilton Kramer is the editor of The New Criterion, a monthly review, and the author of The Age of the Avant-Garde.

“...a dream of becoming
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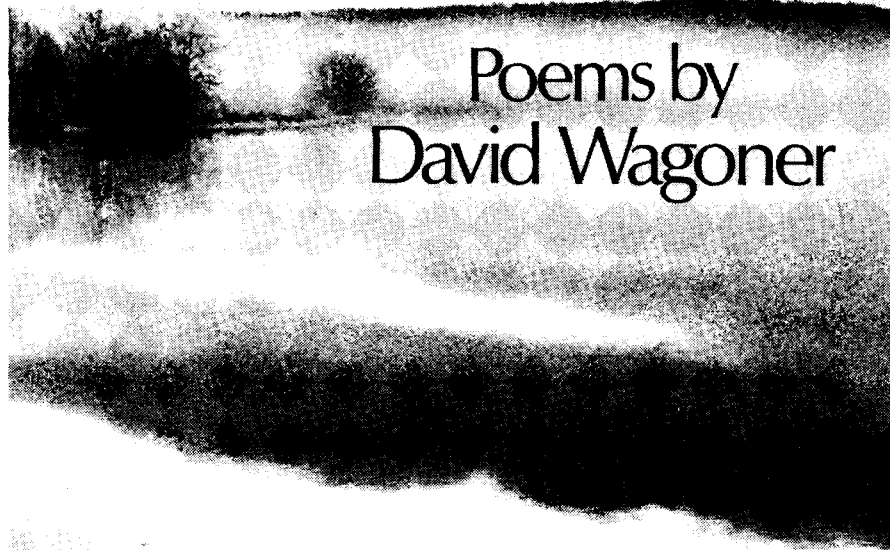
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tinctive feature was said to be that "it does not demand that pleasure in art necessarily be associated with edification." Fundamental to the new sensibility—as she wrote in her manifesto-like essay "One Culture and the New Sensibility," in 1965—was "a new attitude toward pleasure." And it was as the Pasionaria of this new, pleasure-seeking revolution in sensibility that Sontag emerged as a critical spokesman of the sixties.

She was nothing if not explicit in spelling out what this revolution in sensibility entailed. The first thing to be discarded was what she called "the Matthew Arnold idea of culture," which was now judged to be "historically and humanly obsolescent." "The Matthew Arnold notion of culture," she wrote, "defines art as the criticism of life—this being understood as the propounding of moral, social, and political ideas." This was deemed abhorrent on several grounds. It took literature, with "its heavy burden of 'content,' both reportage and moral judgment," as a model, and this would no longer do. "The primary feature of the new sensibility," Sontag insisted, "is that its model product is not the literary work." It looked instead to the "new non-literary culture" as a creative and spiritual paradigm, and there the "basic unit," she noted, "is not the idea, but the analysis of and extension of sensations."

Then, too, the Matthew Arnold idea of culture insisted on "the distinction between 'high' and 'low' " culture, which Sontag now found to be "less and less meaningful." The new sensibility was alleged to have liberated itself from this fussy, outmoded distinction between high culture and popular culture. "If art is understood as a form of discipline of the feelings and a programming of sensations," Sontag wrote, "then the feeling (or sensation) given off by a Rauschenberg painting might be like that of a song by the Supremes." With this and many similar pronouncements, we were certainly a very long way from the Matthew Arnold idea of culture, which Arnold himself defined, in the preface to *Culture and Anarchy*, as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world."

THE FIRST CRITICISM to be made of *A Susan Sontag Reader* is that it omits the essay "One Culture and the New

Sensibility," from which I have been quoting here and which formed the concluding chapter of *Against Interpretation*, serving, in effect, to summarize its entire spirit. Without this essay, the account given us in the *Reader* of the ideas promulgated by Sontag in the sixties remains incomplete and more than a little blurred. Despite what Sontag said about "the idea" no longer functioning as the "basic unit" in the new cultural outlook that she favored, it was above all as an audacious champion of ideas that Sontag herself commanded attention and cast a spell. Hers was but one case among many in the sixties—a particularly distinguished one, of course—of intellectuals engaging in strenuous flights of cerebration on behalf of ideas that promised deliverance from the tyranny of cerebration.

Foremost among the ideas vigorously espoused in *Against Interpretation* was a refurbished and scrupulously up-to-date version of the radical aestheticism that had long been associated with the "decadent" movement of the 1890s. This meant, amid much else, replacing the Matthew Arnold idea of culture with the Oscar Wilde idea of culture. What was now to be exalted was "form," "style," and "the sensory experience of the work of art," as Sontag proclaimed again and again in *Against Interpretation*. (See especially the essays "Against Interpretation," "On Style," and "Notes on 'Camp,'" which are all included in the new *Reader*.)

Acquiring appropriate access to "the sensory experience of the work of art" was no easy task, however. The obstacles strewn by our wretched culture on the road to the desired aesthetic paradise were many and formidable. There was, for example, the dreaded notion of "content"—yet another hateful, life-denying legacy of the Matthew Arnold idea of culture.

"Whatever it may have been in the past," Sontag wrote in 1964, "the idea of content is today mainly a hindrance, a nuisance, a subtle or not so subtle philistinism." The philistinism in question was no ordinary philistinism, however. It was "thoroughly ingrained among most people who take any of the arts seriously," and the worst perpetrators of this brand of philistinism, by far, were the critics who had the temerity to look for "meaning" in art. For it was they who committed the crime of "interpretation," which in our culture was said to be,

among other things, "reactionary, impetuous, cowardly, stifling."

"What the overemphasis on the idea of content entails," Sontag wrote, "is the perennial, never consummated project of interpretation. And, conversely, it is the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content of a work of art." (The emphasis is Sontag's.) "In place of a hermeneutics," Sontag wrote in a celebrated declaration, "we need an erotics of art."

It was in the interest of liberating our responses from the tyranny of "interpretation" that Sontag offered us, in her essay "On Style" (1965), instruction in what the "erotics of art" might be. What



was involved, it turned out, was a programmatic abandonment of "the old antithesis of style versus content." "Everyone is quick to avow that style and content are indissoluble," she wrote. But this avowal she judged to be worthless. "In the practice of criticism, though, the old antithesis lives on, virtually unassailed," Sontag wrote, and she set about assailing it with considerable energy and animus.

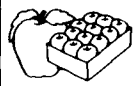
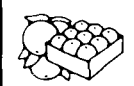
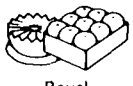
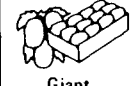
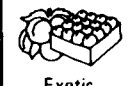
There was something a little odd about this attack on the style-versus-content antithesis, however. For one thing, the argument advanced in the essay never really resolved the issue it ostensibly addressed. "On Style" contains a great many diverse observations about its subject—some keenly intelligent, some very tendentious, some merely commonplace—but in the end it simply comes down on the side of style, belittles

the notion of content, but does not really destroy it, and thus leaves "the old antithesis" more or less intact. For another, the argument on behalf of style is conducted in a cultural void. Reading "On Style" in 1965, one was dismayed to discover that it showed not the slightest awareness of the fact that many of the best modern critics of the arts—Julius Meier-Graefe, Roger Fry, and Clement Greenberg on painting, Adrian Stokes and Edwin Denby on dance, Paul Rosenfeld and Virgil Thomson on music, Stark Young and Francis Fergusson on drama, R. P. Blackmur and others on poetry—had written, and written at length, on matters of "form," "style," and "the sensuous experience of the work of art" with an attention to detail and a sense of complexity that far exceeded anything Sontag was attempting, or was even aware of. Rereading "On Style" in the *Reader*, one wonders if its author was really equipped in 1965 to deal with its subject. So much that is central to it has been either omitted or overlooked.

Perhaps it was not to be expected, however, that the Oscar Wilde idea of culture would yield much in the way of illuminating the problem of relations of form in art to content. Aestheticism, after all, is not primarily a philosophy of art. It is a philosophy of life. It differs from formalism—with which, alas, it is often confused—in being less interested in the perfection of objects than in "a programming of sensations" and in cultivating a certain taste. Whereas formalism attempts to sever the connection between art and life in order to uphold the autonomy of art, aestheticism affirms their ineluctable attachment while at the same time making experience the principal raison d'être of all aesthetic endeavor. No formalist, for example, would ever have boasted, as Wilde did, that he had put his genius into his life and only his talent into his art. From the formalist perspective, this is an abject confession of artistic failure.

Sontag sometimes *sounds* as if she were espousing the formalist view, especially when she is inveighing against "moral sentiments" in art. But when, in the last paragraph of "On Style," she observes that "it remains to be said that style is a notion that applies to any experience (whenever we talk about its form or qualities)," we are made vividly aware that it is something other than the integrity or autonomy of the work of art that is primarily at issue in this essay.

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IT IS NOT, in any case, in the essay "On Style" but in the notorious "Notes on 'Camp'" that we are given our clearest view of the implications of Sontag's aestheticism. It was "Notes on 'Camp'"—first published in *Partisan Review*, in 1964—that made Susan Sontag a famous and controversial figure. For this essay caused a considerable uproar in New York intellectual circles when it first appeared, and it instantly won the attention of the media in a way that critical essays seldom do. It remains today, nearly two decades after its appearance, a classic text in the literature of aestheticism.

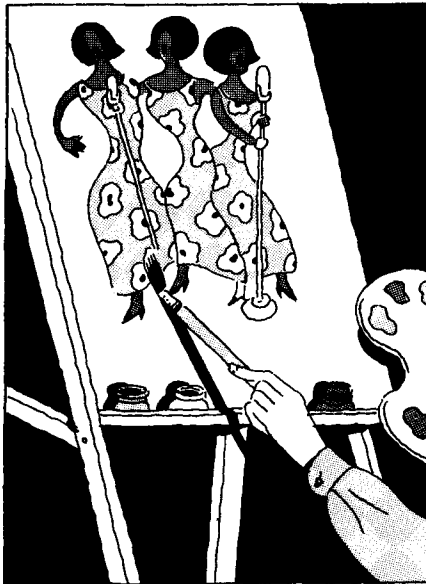
The uproar that greeted it, it must be said, was deserved. For "Notes" achieved something radical and incendiary in offering its readers—the readers of *Partisan Review*, with its long-standing commitment to a Marxist variant of "the Matthew Arnold idea of culture"—a moral holiday. "Notes" spoke for fun, for frivolity, for a wholesale release from the burdens of seriousness. It made the very idea of moral discrimination seem stale and distinctly un-chic.

The essay was not without its evasions. On the one aspect of Camp sensibility that everyone acquainted with the phenomenon was most acutely aware of, for example—its roots in the subculture of homosexuality—"Notes" was extremely coy. But this, too, contributed to its success in offering a rousing description and defense of Camp's cultural appeal. "Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism," Sontag declared, and this declaration had the effect of de-parochializing its special qualities. Of these, clearly the most important for Sontag was that the Camp sensibility "among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous." What she called its "essence" was "its love of the unnatural."

Camp was thus hailed as "the sensibility of failed seriousness," and it was precisely for the praise the essay lavished on "failed seriousness"—and on the consequences that would follow from it—that "Notes on 'Camp'" both caused a scandal and won a following. "Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world," Sontag wrote. "It incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content,' 'aesthetics' over 'morality,' of irony over tragedy." "The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious," she insisted, and it naturally followed that Camp would also serve as "a solvent of morality." Sontag said—as if we needed to be

told!—that "These notes are for Oscar Wilde."

Yet despite her eloquent avowal of this radical position, it is part of the pathos of Sontag's career that she has never been entirely at ease with the aestheticism she has so vigorously espoused. Even in "Notes on 'Camp,'" she spoke of a "conflict in my own sensibility." "I am strongly drawn to Camp," she wrote, "and almost as strongly offended by it." This hint of a disclaimer, if that is what it was, was not very persuasive when "Notes" was first published, for in the sixties Sontag's defense of aestheticism was conducted with an air of stridency and militancy that brooked no possibility of contradiction. Although this sotto voce



suggestion of a dissent from her own position is not very persuasive now, it did, after all, turn out to signify something important. It was not that Sontag was ever prepared to abandon her stand on aestheticism and all its implications. It was only that she did not want it to cost her anything.

It is this desire to have it both ways, I think, that accounts for the very real split that has afflicted Sontag's work more and more openly since the publication of *Against Interpretation*, and at times rendered it, at the very least, morally incoherent. This split would be easier to grasp if Sontag had not excised from the *Reader* nearly all trace of her political writings. The longest single essay in *Styles of Radical Will* (1969), after all, was her unforgettable account of her trip to Hanoi during the Vietnam War—an essay that can justly be called a

classic of its kind. Another important contribution to that book was the essay "What's Happening in America," with its famous declaration that "The white race is the cancer of human history." Afterward, of course, she more or less retracted this statement, but only because she came to feel that it represented an insult—to *cancer*! With such a writer, it is sometimes difficult to give credence to protests against "the propounding of moral, social, and political ideas." The notion of "content" may have become "a hindrance," but it is, apparently, not one that is easily expunged from the literary mind.

SONTAG IS NOTHING if not acutely conscious of every turn her mind has taken, and it is one of the purposes of the *Reader* to set the record straight—if that is the word—on the history of its author's contradictory course (except for explicitly political contradictions: there is no hint in the *Reader* of Sontag's Town Hall speech earlier this year denouncing communism). It will be recalled by readers of "On Style" that Sontag insisted on a complete separation of "form" and "content" when it came to judging two of the films, *The Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, that Leni Riefenstahl made in Nazi Germany under Hitler's personal sponsorship. The passage is worth quoting. "Because they project the complex movements of intelligence and grace and sensuousness, these two films of Riefenstahl (unique among works of Nazi artists) transcend the categories of propaganda or even reportage. And we find ourselves—to be sure, rather uncomfortably—seeing 'Hitler' and not Hitler, the '1936 Olympics' and not the 1936 Olympics. Through Riefenstahl's genius as a filmmaker, the 'content' has—let us assume, against her intentions—come to play a purely formal role." Which, incidentally, reminds us of Sontag's statement in "Notes on 'Camp'" that "Camp sees everything in quotation marks."

Yet in the essay called "Fascinating Fascism" (1974), reprinted in the *Reader*, Sontag registers a loud protest against the movement to purify "Leni Riefenstahl's reputation of its Nazi dross." "The line taken by Riefenstahl's defenders, who now include the most influential voices in the avant-garde film establishment," Sontag writes in this essay, "is that she was always concerned with beauty." The line, in other words,

THE TRUTH

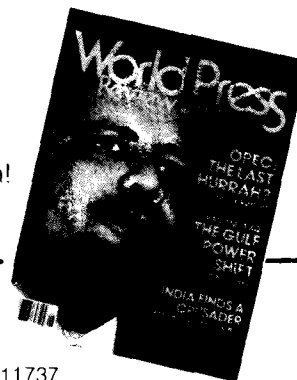
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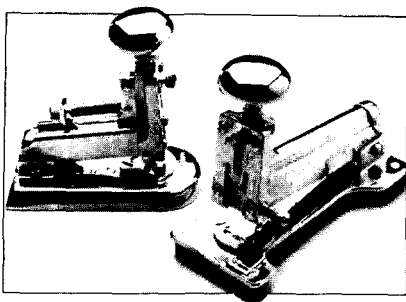
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that Sontag herself took in "On Style." But in "Fascinating Fascism" she writes as if she had only just discovered the Nazi content of these films.

Now, what is extraordinary about the presentation of these contradictory views in the *Reader* is not that the critic has changed her mind on a significant subject. It is entirely to Sontag's credit that she did change her mind—especially on this subject. No, what is extraordinary is that Sontag denies that any significant change occurred. Following "Fascinating Fascism" in the *Reader* is a lengthy interview with Sontag that was originally published in *Salmagundi* in 1976, and the very first question addresses precisely this issue. (That, I suppose, is the main reason the interview is reprinted in the *Reader*.) After quoting from Sontag's comments on Riefenstahl in both "On Style" and "Fascinating Fascism," the friendly interviewer says: "At the very least, these two statements contrast with each other. Is there also a continuity between the two essays?" And this is Sontag's reply:

A continuity, it seems to me, in that both statements illustrate the richness of the form-content distinction, as long as one is careful always to use it against itself. My point in 1965 was about the formal implications of content, while the recent essay examines the content implicit in certain ideas of form. One of the main assertions of 'On Style' is that the formalist and the historicist approaches are not in competition with each other, but are complementary—and equally indispensable.

I am not at all certain that criticism concerned with the content of a work of art can best be described as "historicism," but whatever it is called, there is nothing in "On Style" that suggests that it is indispensable to anything but a certain philistinism.

Sontag says in this interview that she is now—or was it then?—convinced "of the perils of overgeneralizing the aesthetic view of the world." Yet it is precisely upon this tendency that her writings are based. There are more and more hints in her work that she yearns to transcend it and make contact with something more substantial. In the last essay in the *Reader*, on Roland Barthes, she remarks that "Barthes harbored spiritual strivings that could not be supported by his aesthete's position," and this statement seems to describe Son-

tag's position as much as Barthes's. Yet the *Reader* gives us little reason to believe that these strivings can be realized until the spiritual vacuity of aestheticism—and its moral smugness, too—are rigorously confronted. But this would oblige Sontag to reconsider, among much else, the Matthew Arnold idea of culture, and of this there is no serious sign in the *Susan Sontag Reader*. □

SHORT REVIEWS



MISS MANNERS' GUIDE TO EXCRUCIATINGLY CORRECT BEHAVIOR by Judith Martin. Atheneum, \$17.95. Miss Manners, who wears her hair in a mildly slapdash Gibson girl pompadour and claims to be the only person alive who knows "how to make correct morning calls from a brougham," dispenses advice to the socially bewildered in a newspaper column. Miss Manners is superbly well informed (one yearns to procure a brougham and see her in action, but who, in these degenerate times, would answer the morning bell except, heaven forbid, the prospective non-hostess?) and tartly sensible. She is also ruthless. Do you seek to avoid undesirable wedding presents? Forget it. There is no way. But she has moments of tolerance, for while her general advice to young ladies who contemplate making formal debuts is "Don't," she obliges with the rules for those determined "to meet a lot of young men who have come to believe that the world owes them free champagne."

Miss Manners, in fact, is enormously funny, and so are the problems that beset her clients. How does one respond when a couple of old schoolmates send an invitation (on a silk-screened card) to "partake in a ritual celebrating the congruence of their lives"?

THEIR NOBLE LORDSHIPS by Simon Winchester. Random House, \$14.50. Mr. Winchester considers the peerage obsolete and the House of Lords doomed to early eradication, but his interesting report on "Class and Power in Modern Britain" indicates that peers, although wildly varied in tastes, character, accomplishments, and finances, have as a

group remarkable canniness in one area, and that area is the art of survival. The book contains rather more information on precedence and protocol than non-British readers require, but Mr. Winchester's accounts of individual peers are generally sympathetic and often amusing, while his attempts to discover who owns what, although unsuccessful, reveal a most wonderful maze of arrangements for the obfuscation of tax collectors.

LAST RITES by *Aram Saroyan*. *Morrow*, \$10.00. The great charm of William Saroyan's writing was the sense it conveyed of love and family solidarity. In real life, Saroyan showed no such warmth, being indeed positively hostile to his children and their mother. Nobody should expect an author of fiction to resemble what he writes, and the sad truth about Saroyan as husband and father is no great surprise, nor is his son's desire to record the family miseries and to honor his father's final, deathbed show of affection—but the tale does make very dismal reading.

MICRONESIA: THE LAND, THE PEOPLE AND THE SEA by *Kenneth Brower*. *Louisiana*, \$19.95. Prowling about among 2,105 islands, Mr. Brower reports on scenery, customs, languages, history, marine life, ruins, and the deplorable prospect of modernization. His true loves, however, are canoes and navigation, and he makes the reader share his enthusiasm by explaining clearly how the islanders manage long voyages without instruments. Only a camel could fail to be charmed by Hipour, a great expert who "had started his training as a navigator late—his father had not taken him to sea until he was eight—but he had surmounted that." The book is generously illustrated with color photographs by Harri Peccinotti and has endpaper maps, without which the reader would soon lose his bearings.

AKÉ by *Wole Soyinka*. *Random House*, \$14.95. The author is professor of comparative literature at the University of Ife, Nigeria, and holds an honorary doctorate of letters from Yale. This looks formidably academic, but Professor Soyinka's recollections of his childhood in the town of Aké are not academic in the least. He was a comically precocious tyke, balancing between the ancestral world of Yoruba myth and his parents'

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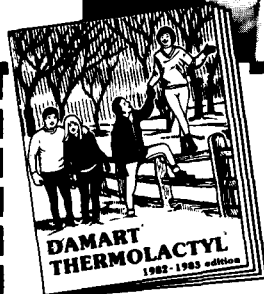
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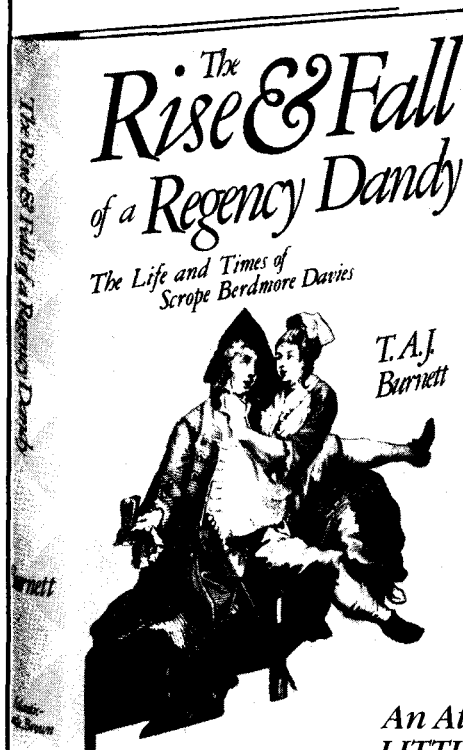
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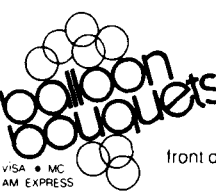
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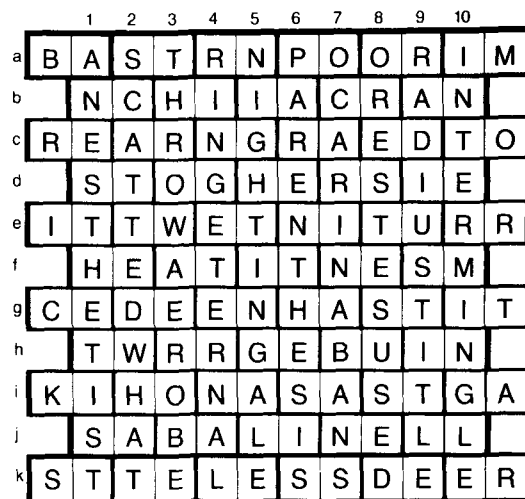
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ATLANTIC 9/82

Answers
to the
August
Puzzler,

"BUILDING BLOCKS"



Across. a. BAR-N; IMPOSTOR (anag.) b. C(RAN)IA; HI-NC c. (s)TORE; A-R(RANG)ED d. STOGIE (anag.); H(ER)S e. TU(RRE)T (err rev.); NI-TWIT (in rev.) f. A-THEN-E; SMIT(h) g. HAS-TEN; D(E)CEIT (anag + e) h. BURR (double def.); i. TWIN(G)E j. HOST (double def.); NAG-A-SAKI k. BALL (double def.); SALINE (anag.) l. LE(SS)ER; DETEST (pun) Down. 1. AN-ES(THE-T-IS)T 2. SCATTED (double def.); WHAT (anag.) 3. TH(e)-ROW; A-E-ROBE 4. RING (double def.); E(x)TERNAL 5. NIGH(TIN)-GALE 6. PARENT(HE)-SIS 7. OCARINA (anag. minus m); B-ANS 8. ORESTES (anag.); US-ED 9. R-ADIUS (r + anag.); TI(T)LE 10. IN(TERMING)LE (line anag.)

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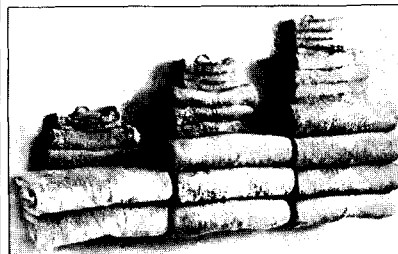
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THE ATLANTIC PUZZLER

BY EMILY COX AND HENRY RATHVON

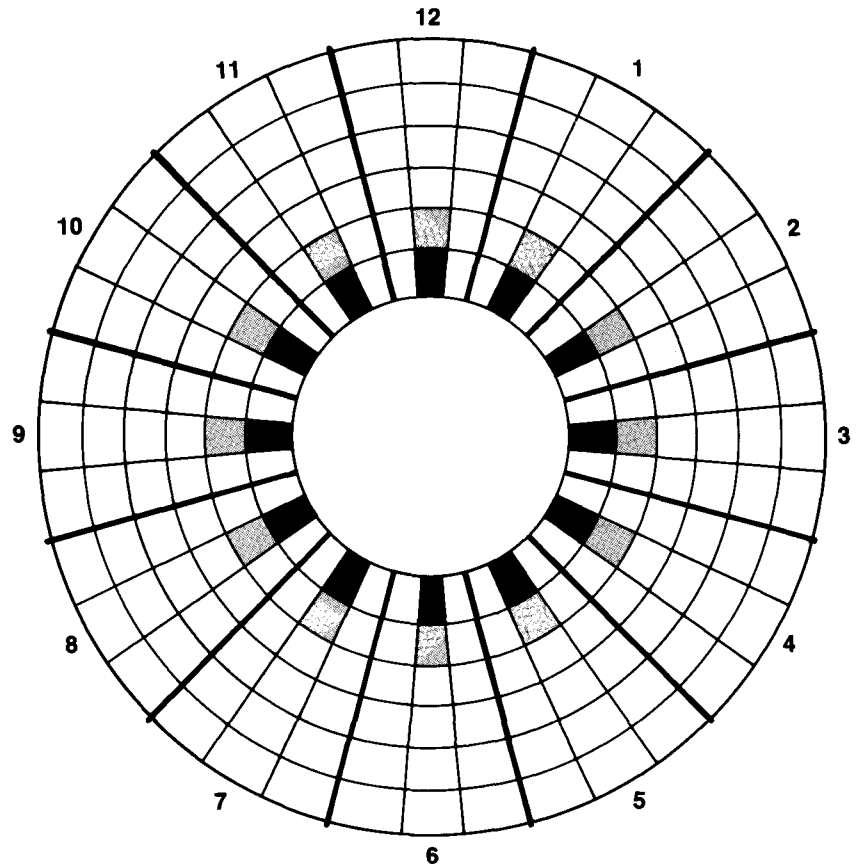
SPINNING WHEEL

Each section of this wheel contains 4 whole words—three 6-letter words and one 5-letter word. Two of the 6-letter words and the 5-letter word are to be entered radially, either inward or outward (in all, 18 go inward and 18 go outward). The remaining 6-letter word in each section belongs in the yellow rings, starting at any block, but always proceeding clockwise.

Each set of 4 clues (lettered a-l below) yields, in no special order, one section's words. The sets themselves are also presented out of order; the innermost and outermost rings of the wheel should help you restore proper order. Letters that fall in the gray squares will form a self-descriptive phrase.

Answers include an uncommon 5-letter word (in clue set j), one foreign word, and five proper nouns.

*The solution to last month's
Puzzler appears on page 99.*



CLUES

- a. Wheel part has 12th letter filled in right (6)
Short guy is taking Alternative Dance (6)
Merger of Standard and Poor's seen in column (6)
Plants a bit of opium in drinks (5)
- b. Around bishop's jurisdiction, *Flying Nun* is not showing (6)
Search about Riviera, from east to west, for artistic merit (5)
Trapping bug in the middle, fluid resin hardens (6)
Jack's taking a relative for spins (6)
- c. Cruel wound makes stomach sore (5)
Opposed state senate's limits (6)
Work in arena practicing with a lasso (6)
Pierce developed formula (6)
- d. Do damage to Young Rascal song (6)
Indiana basketballer makes summary return (5)
In speech, put pressure on a world power (6)
- e. Steamship rounding point of land affords scenic views (6)
- f. Poet in a dither about right figure of speech (5)
Sarcastic style of column about Republican (6)
Pair carrying soap ingredient did laundry (6)
You must get back off horse before obtaining riding school recognition (6)
- g. Cheerful pub prepared snack (6)
Tablet broken in fight (6)
Far-fetched claim for a type of acid (5)
Figure on somebody's signal to come home (6)
- h. Someone at home has not yet finished cookies (6)
Easy to row around current (6)
Baby clothing fabric—50% knit (6)
Stood for a drink made from skinless grapes (5)
- i. State a vow at the altar, suppressing a sigh (5)
Win over chief of military after surprise raids (6)
Construction worker owns one house in France (6)
Vessel with room aboard for rats (6)
- j. Fixed free eats: scrambled egg (6)
River road taken by saint (6)
Rev going west to get some gold (6)
Angel with audio antenna (5)
- k. Plane to South America has lost cargo (6)
Satin's ruffled in spots (6)
Edict from Great Britain reapportioned sea (5)
Servant has meal around in back (6)
- l. Loosen up Ann's nuts (6)
Emotional tension in song (6)
Paintings in resort in part of Greece (6)
Deli tea comes with cream (5)
- m. Old ship has grand passageway (6)
Herb found in Sudan is edible (5)
Cooks getting breathers around mid-afternoon (6)
The distance between finishers hurt spirits (6)

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Only 5 mg.**



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